The Magazine for Golden Age & Silver Age Collectors!

COMIC BOOK MARKETPLACE

No. 39
September 1996

$4.95 U.S./$6.50 Canada
A GEMSTONE PUBLICATION

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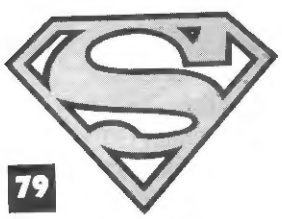

® WILL EISNER

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ON THE COVER
Murphy Anderson's original painting recreating the cover of *Fantastic Comics* #3 featuring the Fox character Sampson.

Joe Sinnott's moody rendition of one of comics' great super-villains, Dr. Doom.

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Issue Number #39, September 1996

WONDER-FUL 100s!

The other day, friend and fellow collector Bob Casali was visiting and we began to discuss one of our favorite topics... lesser known and possibly under-appreciated Silver Age DCs. During our discussion, Bob reminded me of the exceptionally high grade copy of *Wonder Woman* #105 which sold at the San Diego Con for an astonishing $3,000. This prompted us to review some of the other great *Wonder Woman* issues from the same period, especially issues #90 -120.

For example, *Wonder Woman* #98 contains the first interiors by Andru and Esposito and is, in a real sense, the first Silver Age Wonder Woman issue. Issue #99 contains the story "Top Secret" which is an excellent and rarely documented origin of Wonder Woman's secret identity. The last story in #100 was especially written for the centennial issue... and is entitled "Wonder Woman's 100th Anniversary." All three issues are of historical importance to the Silver Age Wonder Woman mythos.

Most collectors know that *Superman*, *Batman*, and *Wonder Woman* are renowned in our hobby for being the only Silver Age superhero character-titles continuously published since the Golden Age. *Wonder Woman* #100 seems an obvious historical parallel to *Superman* #100 and *Batman* #100... and it seems logical that *WW* #100 would have a value commensurate with this relationship.

So we hit the latest Price Guide to check it out. A quick scan revealed that many Silver *Wonder Woman* issues seemed amazingly inexpensive. For instance, issue #98 lists for $95 in NM and #99 lists for $85 in NM. But the most startling for me is the NM listing for *Wonder Woman* #100. The NM value listed for *Batman* #100 (June 1956) is $1,700. The NM value listed for *Superman* #100 (September/October 1955) is listed at $1,400, and an NM value of *Wonder Woman* #100 (August 1958) is listed at... (drum roll please) $105!!!

The gulf between values of *Wonder Woman* #100, *Superman* #100, and *Batman* #100 seems immense. As another point of reference, the NM value of *World's Finest* #100 (March 1959) is listed at $265. In my book, that makes *Wonder Woman* #100 (along with *WW* #98 and #99) among the most reasonably priced Silver Age comic books I can think of.

As I pondered the low value of *WW* #100, I remembered the fact that, with the notable exceptions of *Superman* and *Batman*, all Silver Age DC #100s are often overlooked issues. To me, all of the DC Silver 100s are historically significant because of their longevity... a rare condition in an industry noted for short lived titles. These wonderful issues are literally a "roll call" of classic genres and characters ... many of which remain virtually unnoticed by many hobbyists. 100th issues from titles like *Real Screen, Strange Adventures, World's Finest, All Star Western, Our Army At War, Star Spangled War Stories, Hopalong Cassidy, House Of Mystery,* and others are all members of this interesting sub-genre. And most still have *Guide* values that are wonderfully affordable.

It's my hope that future issues of *CBM* will further illuminate both the Silver Age Wonder Woman timeline and DC Silver Age 100th issues. Who knows? Perhaps some knowledgeable *CBM* reader is, even now, researching ALL of the comic titles that reached a 100th issue... and will hopefully share it with the rest of us in a future issue.

In any case, as more and more topics come to the forefront of collector discussion, my favorite adage about comic books seems truer than ever... we still have so much to discover, so much to document, and so much to learn!

May you fill the holes on your want list!

Gary

Gary M. Carter, Editor

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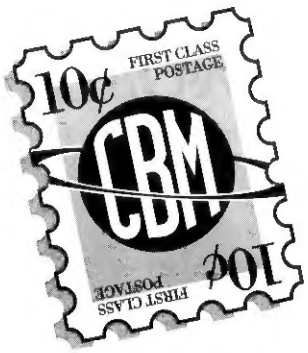

By Any Yardstick

My thoughts on CBM #38: (1) Will Eisner. No matter how many times I re-read The Spirit's adventures, I am always in awe of Mr. Eisner's grasp of human nature and his (still!) unequaled storytelling in an 8-page package that would take today's artists a year and 24 crossover comics to approach but not equal. I first saw his work in the Harvey reprints of '66 and I first thought "Who does this guy think he is imitating, Jim Steranko?" It didn't take long for me to figure out that it was the other way around and here was the original! By any yardstick, Eisner is a true master of the art form. Peter DePree's article made me feel as if I was right there listening to those pro's conversation! (2) Robert Beerbohm's editorial left me wanting to know more about the "Mafia Connection" and anxiously awaiting publication of his book! (3) About Marvel Comics-From Silver to Bronze: When I was a kid, I didn't know when the Silver Age had ended, but I did recognize that there was a transitional phase going on as a lot of the original creators had left the series and their replacements were recycling their plots. There was some creativity and originality during this period, but for the most part a lot of my favorite books had lost their zip. (4) The Brave and Bold Team-Ups: James Cangialosi said everything I would have said on the subject except that I wish I had them all today! Sincerely,

Eric G. Blackmore, Tennessee

King Variants

Enjoy your magazine very much, when Diamond agreed to get it for me. The part I have enjoyed most is about the obscure comics and covers that are not seen from the Golden Age, which has prompted me to write about some of the King Comics, which are a part of my collection.

Enclosed are photographs of three of the seven King Comics that I have. They are dated 1936/1937 and are different than the covers in Gerber. I am 90% certain that they are the original covers for these comics, which were held by the owner for a very long time. When they were purchased by me in an auction in the north of England and I was not able to discover, where he purchased them originally.

I did originally think they were Canadian or Australian reprints but all have "printed in the USA" in small letters in the centre of the cover, none have any information except "1937" and a number in pencil on the cover and a very small "1936" on the back. I am resoably certain that the number is the number of the right comic and is original. All are about in decent condition and the photos do not exactly do them justicce, but were printed dark so you could see the covers better.

Perhaps you or your readers have some other ideas on why the covers are different. As a matter of interest, Harley Yee has seen the comics and it was him that pointed out the difference in the covers. Keep up the good work, hope to hear from you.

David Shack, England

DC Horror Book?

Thanks for a great magazine! The new CBM is just as good as the old. I just got issue #34 (the Dick Sprang cover) and would like a subscription beginning with #35.

I also had a question that perhaps you or another reader could answer. I have been searching for years to two book; 1) Shazam From The '40s To The '70s edited by E. Nelson Bridwell - hardcover... and 2) The Best of DC Horror Comics trade paperback (part of a series which includes The Best of DC Science Fiction, War, and Romance comics, which came out in the late seventies/early eighties) Any ideas on where to locate either (especially the Shazam book)?

Mike Jackson, California

I have the DC Sci-Fi, War, and Romance compilations... but, have never seen the Horror book. Perhaps a CBM reader could enlighten us both. Thanks for writing.

Wise Business Move

Picked up the most recent issue of FAN magazine and was surprised (and, yes, disappointed) with the new pricing format. Of course, I do not have the insight into the existing and targeted readership of FAN as you do, and so I recognize the possibility that the decision to become more Wizard-like may well be a wise business move. However, from the perspective of a collector/dealer of Golden and Silver Age books I find the change to be unfriendly to the needs of my customers and myself. Seeing NM pricing only is a little like going to a foreign country and having to translate in your mind the relative value of two currencies before making any purchase. In short, the exclusive listing of NM pricing sends the message to me that FAN is not really geared toward the serious collector of vintage material. Yet as I sat there mulling over this disappointing turn of events, a hope emerged. I thought, "Well, monthly price changes seemed a bit excessive anyway. Something like quarterly pricing updates would be a better rhythm. I wonder..." And then the obvious struck: CBM! I thought, "Why doesn't CBM publish quarterly pricing updates for Golden and Silver Age material? This would serve to substantiate their banner claim that they are indeed the magazine for serious collectors, and, no doubt, the quarterly updates would be big sellers for CBM, introducing many new readers to the still somewhat-exclusive magazine. Shoot, everyone would want one. Further, this separation of Golden/Silver from Bronze/modern would more accurately reflect the actual groupings of the collector/dealer community as I experience it!" "Yes," I mused, "this would be a win-win." So, how about it? I to see CBM flourish, and I would very much like periodic pricing updates. The CBM solution does it all. I hope you'll seriously consider this appeal from a devoted reader. Sincerely,

Doc Robinson, Georgia

Applause For Nolan

Just a brief note to say that Michelle Nolan's "Heroes in the '50's!" was a superb article. Her research was remarable and deserves a rousing round of applause from all fandom.

To answer her questions: the Tomboy story from Captain Flash #1, illustrated in CBM

#35, was illustrated by comicbook great...the legendary Mort Meskin! He only drew the initial adventure, unfortunately and the remaining three fell into lesser (and unknown) hands. The Dell Comics Green Hornet one-shot was also illustrated by an all time great...Frank Thorne! I've loved that book since the day I bought it and had no idea it was considered "rare."

Michelle's checklist of '50's costumed heroes was magnificent. Someday when I have tons of free time (insert laugh track here) I'll have to check to see how many of these I have. At first glance, I certainly have at least have half of those listed in my collection.I learned from Michelle's article that Tomboy was the only original female character created in the 1950's—never thought of that—so that fact alone puts the Meskin story at the top of my list of stories to reprint. Michelle can look for another Captain Flash story in AC's Golden Age Men of Mystery No. 2 (July 1996). He's on the cover, too!

Not mentioned in the article were the Purple Claw and Phantom Stranger. Of course they could be considered in the "horror" genre and they didn't wear costumes but then neither did Crimebuster during the 1950's. When Dr. Weir put on the Purple Claw is was kinda a costume? I'm reaching, eh?

Bill Black, Florida

Very Insightful

Just really enjoyed CBM #35. The interview with Roy Thomas was very insightful. Many long-time fans wish they could have progressed from comics fandom to professional work like he did. Not only does Mr. Thomas remember a lot from fandom's early days, he can also tell wonderful tales about comics from behind the scenes. In addition, Roy Thomas' writing has always been fresh, yet a bit retro in perspective so that even veteran readers can appreciate his modern storylines. His introduction to Bill Shelly's book, The History of Comics Fandom, provides interested readers with further discussion on the hobby's origins.

Being a Superman fan, I really appreciated the feature on unknown Superman. The covers to the Triumph magazines in the Color Gallery were beautiful. Superman completists should be inspired to know that lots of material featuring the Man of Sterel (much of it rare) is available overseas!!

Keep up the good work! Sincerely,

Paul Stefanowicz, New Jersey

Black Terror #1

Have been reading and collecting comic books off and on since 1962, and still own some of the early greats (Silver Age). I grow up loving the art of Jack Kirby's Fantastic Four and Thor also Steve Ditko's work on Spider-Man. I am a 43-year-old who's started collecting the Golden Age and have picked up every issue of CBM, a fantastic source of information which I look forward to each and every month.

My first purchase was a Black Terror #1 in Fine condition. Many of my collector friends tell me this was a very fortunate and lucky find. My problem is that I cannot find out who did the cover of this comic or the inside art work. Since Alex Schomburg did the others I was wondering if he did the first issue. I have bought all the Gerber books and there is no info on this book except the year it came out.

Also, do you feel as I do that this book and the other Black Terror's have a very bright future. Thank you very much for your help and time.

Ronald G. Porter, Pennsylvania

Funnyman

Got my copy of CBM #35 and was happy to see the short feature on my all-time favorite crimefighter, Funnyman! Well, I'm happy to say that today I'm about as enlightened about Funnyman as I'm likely to get, having interviewed the surviving artists who worked on the comics and the strip. Which, by the way, was all new, non-reprint material done for the dailies and the separate Sunday continuities. In its later months the strip was taken over by Siegel & Shuster's much earlier creation, Reggie van Twerp. Guess they figured anything was worth a try to keep the strip going?!

Joe Shuster had much more of an assist than just Dick Ayers, who did his first pro work on FM. Do the names Marvin Stein and John Sikela sound familiar?

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Incidentally, some papers which carried the Funnyman strip considered it to be the "real Siegel & Shuster strip," and some dropped Superman while continuing to carry Funnyman!

The obvious reason Superman was a big success and Funnyman was not is because Supes created an entire new genre; he had no real competition to prevent him from "taking root" and getting noticed. In the case of Funnyman, the market was already saturated with humor and teen-type comics, and secondly, fans had pretty much reached their fill of costumed heroes of any sort, super or otherwise! But I would hesitate to characterize Funnyman as a "bizarre footnote" in the careers of Siegel & Shuster. I can't help but feel if they were here to respond to that, they would make it more than clear that they strongly felt otherwise. Indeed, Funnyman represents the "otherside of the S & S story" as Paul Harvey might say; the humorous side. Which was actually the side of their creative efforts which this imaginative team felt most strongly about... according to their own words. That they are today known for Superman is largely a matter of circumstance; I don't quite know if they would have characterized that fact as "providential" or not, considering their experiences surrounding Superman.

FM's flying auto was called the "Jet Jalopy" though other alliterative monikers might have been used for it, since that was part of the poetry that made FM a unique comic.

The reason the "superhero aspects of the strip were slim pickings" was because Funnyman was not a superhero. Duh! Shuster in one interview he did in 1948 made a big point out of the fact that FM is vulnerable! The concept is not unlike "Sienfeld" in that the point of the stories is that FM has no "power." He just used his wits; the stories are "idea-driven," not action/power driven; not that there wasn't plenty of action. (The Sienfeld TV show is based on the idea that there is no "idea/plot" as such. It's about "nothing." Kinda like FM is about no "powers." Maybe FM was ahead of its time?)

Concerning Shuster's art in FM: he only did the rough layouts and finishes on some faces with some exceptions. Stein, who did some fabulousart for the comics has not gotten the respect he deserves from fandom, because he spent most of his time making big money doing advertising illustration; he later helped Simon & Kirby at their Crestwood studio. How many artists do you know who worked for both Siegel & Shuster and Simon and Kirby? He was highly respected in both studios!

I guess here's my chance to put in my two-cents for what I consider to be the best-ever drawn and designed/structured comics cover that's been doone: Funnyman #1 by Marvin Stein with roughs and the thug character-type and its pose done in the Shuster manner! Every detail is there "for a purpose." It "works," as we say in the fine arts arena!

Funnyman can surely not be compared with the characters in Dumb and Dumber. For FM was "dumb" like a fox! He reminds me of the scripture verse I use beneath my Alpha Omega apazine heading , 1 Corinthians 1:27 "...but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things that are strong." Sounds pretty much like Funnyman to me.

Perhaps Funnyman was not as successful as Superman simply because most people/fans think—from a worldly viewpoint—that all heroes should be "wise and strong." Funnyman was neither!

Harry W. Miller, Kentucky

Roy Thomas Writes

Thanks to you, your staff, and Matt Brady for the attractive and extended coverage of yours truly in CBM #35, an issue which was the usual fine job I've come to expect over the past year that I've been a subscriber.

A few errors of fact which perhaps crept in because Matt was interviewing me over the phone and a few things clearly got garbled. Hence this letter, to set the record straight on those few points:

1) Re the matter of how Neal and I co-plotted The X-Men and The Avengers in the late 60's (as opposed to Neal's alledged recent delusion that he did all the plotting himself): All quotes attributed to me in the interview are accurate except for the one about the idea of "Skrulls as cows left over from Fantastic Four #2" came up in our first joint chapter of the Skrull/Kree War.

What I meant to say–what I believe I did say–was that the notion of using the Skrull cows was initially mine, so far as I recall; I mentioned it to Neal as we were stopped at a

stoplight on 3rd Avenue, I remember, during a noontime walk, and he sparked to it at once. One thing that had always intrigued me, besides the fact that there were these shape-changing Skrulls who had been hypnotized into thinking they were real cows, was that there had been four such Skrulls in FF #2–one to impersonate each of the FF–but when the FF fought them in the story's climax, they fought only three, and never seemed to notice that one of them was definitely missing. There were only three cows grazing in the field at the end of the issue, as well.

So I figured we might as well account for where that "fourth Skrull" had been for the past several years. Neal added great artwork and minor details to that sequence, of course, but that crucial part of the story was mine just as much as the wonderful "Inside the Vision" chapter was his idea. (By the way, I'm curious–where was Neal quoted re all this half-true pseudo-information about how he plotted all those X-Men and Avenger issues? (I suppose that sometime I should read the original.)

Incidentally, though all the Avengers plots (and most if not all of the X-Men plots) were basically my concepts that he fleshed out and added considerable detail to, Neal did plot one X-Men issue fully–the "space-slave" one, accredited to Denny O'Neil as writer. Here's how it happened: Neal approached me one day in the office and asked if it was okay with me if he plotted an issue–that he had a story he wanted to do. I told him fine (since I had plenty of calls upon my time)), and probably got a few words out of him about the proposed storyline. I was to have dialouged that issue, and its credits would doubtless have listed me as "writer." Neal as "artist." because Neal nevber asked for plotting credit (nor were our page rates affected).

However, at the last minute, I found I was too busy, and since I didn't have any particular attachment to Neal's story (though I liked it), I asked Denny to dialogue the issue instead–or maybe Neal suggested Denny–I don't really recall, since that aspect of things wasn't important to me at the time. On that single issue, as I've said before and will say again, Neal definitely deserved credit as full plotter, whether Denny scripted it or whether I had–but that's the only one.

Hiwever, if anyone asks me, I'm always quite willing to give Neal credit as a co-plotter of our X-Men and Avengers issues, just as Kirby and Ditko were on the early Marvel classics–just as Don Heck, Dick Ayers, and others were, for that matter. We just never worried about those things in those days. But Neal shouldn't leap in at this late stage and try to claim even more credit than the ample credit he already deserves, don't you think? Or maybe Neal was misquoted... he's certainly never suggested in any of our conversations over the years that he plotted X-Men or Avengers for me. 2) Somehow the article suggests that I traded the cover of the third Hawkman/Brave & Bold issue (with the Shadow Theif)) for "...one of the pages from the first JLA/JSA team up." Not true. Much as I loved the JLA/JSA crossovers, a Joe Kubert Hawkman cover for a Mike Sekowsky interior page would hardly be my idea of a fair trade. 3)) By a strange garbling, part of my description of the contents of my favorite run of All-Star Comics (#33-41) got run together to create a description of an entirely new issue: "...the Per Degaton story which guest-starred Superman and Batman where they were all killed and brought back to life." This actually describes, of course, no less than three separate issues–#35, #36, and #38.

I tried to correct an informational error which had crept into issue #33, regarding the Fantastic Four Big Little Book of 1968. As I said there (but perhaps that whole letter was lost in the mails?), the art in that BLB was not by Kirby, as stated in CBM, but by Herb Trimpe–inked by John Verpoorten.

Still, CBM #35 was by and large a very good issue, and while my interest in comics is an old-time reader and later writer/editor, more than as a collector (though I am that, too), I look forward to future ones. Best wishes,

Roy Thomas, South Carolina

Nothing To Do With Xmas

Reading about all of the square bound comics in issue #35 brought to mine the biggest comic I have ever seen (and now own). Upon walking into Big Guys Comics a few months ago, I observed the owner thumbing through what appeared to be a small phone book. I took a ruler to this thing and it was 5/8" thick!

Anyway, upon closer examination, I found that it was Xmas Comics #2 by Fawcett Publications. There are 5 Golden Age books composing this monster. The page count is 324! If anyone knows of a larger comic book (excluding Xmas #1 which is the same size) I would like to know about it.

For those that are curious about it's contents, it has *(Continued on page 76)*

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SOMETIMES ELECTRIFYING, SOMETIMES SHOCKING, AND SOMETIMES EVEN REVOLTING... ELECTROCUTION COVERS ARE STILL AVIDLY COLLECTED.

Of all the pre-Code crime and horror cover images, none could rival the electric chair in creating a visceral and vibrant intimation of impending death. The "hot seat" covers were graphic representations of the destructive power of modern science, and the tingling terror they inspired was like a miniature version of the lethal fury the grim devices delivered. Publisher Bill Gaines summed it up on the inside front cover of *Shock Suspenstories* #1: "...the cover... has nothing to do with any of the stories in this magazine. Since this was to be the first issue of *Shock*; we wanted a real shock cover! Know of anything more shocking than an electric chair?" And even without an accompanying story, the Al Feldstein cover manages to explore the tenuous territory between torture and justice.

Shock Suspenstories #1 (February/March 1952) offers an admirably varied assortment of stories. Billed as an "EC sampler", the four tales run the gamut of EC's suspense genres, with one crime, one war, one science fiction, and one horror yarn. The crime opener relates the end of a marriage between a tormented young woman and her overbearing perfectionist of a husband. Given that, most EC fans can fill in the plot details... The art was provided by the capable Jack Kamen.

The war suspense story is more original and packs a solid punch. Colonel Henderson is forced to court martial his son for desertion and when a guilty verdict is

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delivered must sentence him to death by the firing squad. The interplay between father and son before the execution is intensely emotional, and the Colonel injects a fitting twist to the taut proceedings. The Jack Davis drawings perfectly capture the characters, with a style that's cartoony and ultra-realistic at the same time.

The sci-fi entry, "The Monsters", is a "first contact" tale designed to make one feel humble about their humanity. The aliens refuse to have anything to do with the Earth people, and their explanation as to why isn't really a surprise but still manages to impart a mild jolt of EC irony. And the smooth surfaces of Joe Orlando's art add to the enjoyment. The horror finale, drawn by "Ghastly" Graham Ingels, is an abomination called "The Rug". Absurd yet predictable, this "biter-bitten" chestnut about a nasty hunter who (spoiler warning- ha!) gets killed and skinned by a bear, is–despite everything- still somewhat amusing. Feldstein's plot formulas were always well-paced and well-turned, however contrived, and Ghastly's art is joyously ghastly.

Manhunt #2 (November 1947) is the second issue of a title that was structured something like *Shock Suspense*. There's an urban crime, a nature crime, a gothic crime, a future crime, and Undercover Girl, a sultry secret agent who also stars on the cover. "Dinner Date with Death" is actually a two-page text story that appears on the inside covers and was written by the great Gardner F. Fox. Undercover Girl gets captured by some effete evildoer who forces her to share an elegant meal with him while strapped into an electric chair. Thus, for her, the meal might be eternally interrupted while savoring caviar or just after a sip of 1928 port. It's a clever premise but ends in an anti-climax. It does make an intriguing tie-in with the Ogden Whitney cover that catches the narrative at a peak moment.

Fallon of the F.B.I. starts off the insides in a so-so episode with Whitney art. This is followed by the Red Fox of the Royal Canadian Northwest Mounted Police, which features appealing art by L.B. Cole. Cole takes an outdoorsy approach with the rugged landscape lovingly detailed, and the characters look good too. The story is just strong enough to hold it together, but that's sufficient to make it a satisfying strip. Kirk of Scotland Yard mixes a bit of London fog into the anthology, and the Paul Parker art is appropriately atmospheric in this tale of murder during a seance where someone gets stabbed while all present are holding hands in a circle. It's modestly entertaining.

The sci-fi ingredient in the Manhunt

Continued from page 14

recipe was Space Ace, with somewhat flat yet evocative art by Fred Guardineer. This is one of those space-opera strips that manages to transcend its own rococo nonsense as Jet Black "a patrolman of the future, a man with star-tan on his face", fights the interplanetary menace of "The Being in the Box.." Only an artist like Guardineer can make this kind of material flourish, and here the results are delectable.

Undercover Girl appears again, in a seven-page story that works hard to display the charms of Starr Flagg, the beautiful C.I.A. agent. Ogden Whitney pays some respect to the female form in this strip, but the plot is pretty good too, with some gentle depth of character blended into the action.

Manhunt was one of the first post-War crime titles, followed by a flood of them in 1948 and 1949. Manhunt was published by Vincent Sullivan's Magazine Enterprises (ME).

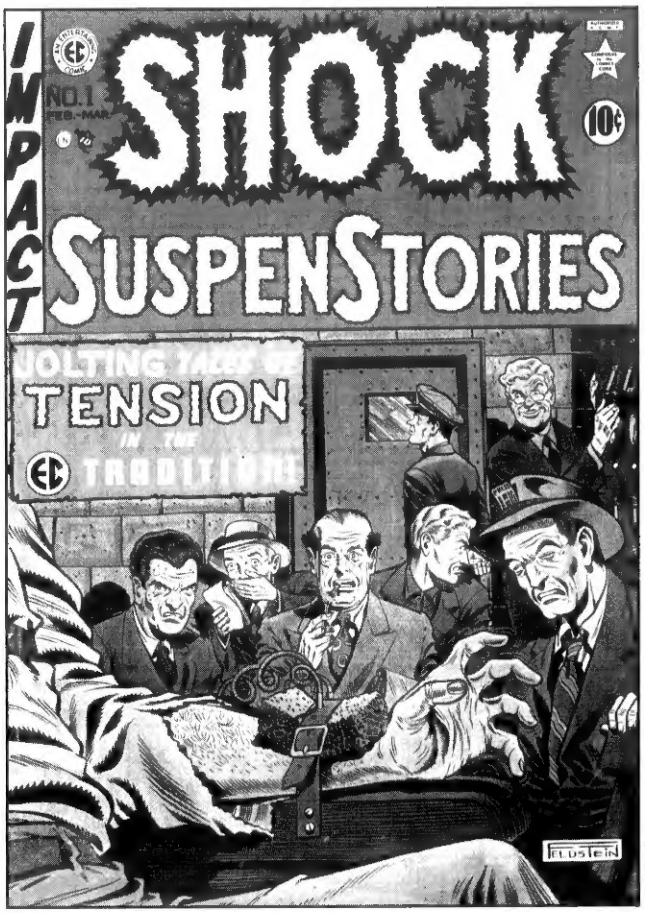
Atlas joins in with an electrocution cover on *Suspense* #25 (December 1952). "I Died at Midnight" is a fine example of one of Atlas' most beloved plot formulas: the "death row escape". No matter how much the time-travel or alternate world or good old magical second chance seems to help the murderer on the lam evade his fate, at the end, in one way or another (and there were plenty) death deals out the final justice. These stories almost always expand with psychological possibilities- as they could just as easily be hallucinations of the condemned, like in Ambrose Bierce's "Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge", where a whole escape sequence transpires in the moment between the trapdoor's opening and the rope stretching tight to snap the spinal column and end all dreams.

"Men With Fangs" tells of were-rats in the sewers beneath the city streets and of the man who goes underground to confront them after they kidnap his wife. Lurid art by fantasy great Joe Sinnott takes an average story and makes it into a superior product with clearly-conceived characters in imaginative and colorful settings.

There's also a clunky werewolf yarn in this ish, a letter column– "Suspense Sanctuary"– where Stan Lee practices his repartee, and "The Man Who Sold His Soul", a six-page wish-fulfillment fantasy gone awry. The story of Enrico, a Mr. Nobody in Spain whose dreams of being a great bullfighter seem impossible until he meets the devil and is offered a deal, is nicely turned, and the art by John Romita is graphic narrative of a high order. Each panel carries the story forward with perfectly distilled images. Much of the tale is told on Enrico's face, as waves of despair are followed by waves of hope, which give way to the greed that jumps to the fatal indiscretion which guarantees the wave of terror when Enrico finds that the bargainer from below has tricked him. It adds up to a worthwhile issue, with that "demon of death appearing as the electrifying switch is pulled" cover expertly wrapping up the package.

Before signing off for this issue, I'd like to point out three more great electric chair covers… outside my collection but glimpsed via Gerber's "flying carpet" *Photo-Journal*. They are *Web of Evil* #5's Jack Cole shocker, Steve Ditko's emotive masterpiece done for *Strange Suspense Stories* #19, and L.B. Cole's iconic warning of the law's ultimate retribution on *Law-Crime* #1. Till the next *CBM*… ■

Pat S. Calhoun is the author/co-author of several Overstreet Annual Price Guide *feature articles, and his "Weird Words" column in* CBM *is now in its sixth year.*



Shock Suspenstories #1 (Feb/Mar 1952) Al Feldstein's cover features a fascinating gallery of facial responses to the electrifying moment when life is transformed to death.

Manhunt #2 (Nov 1947) The enemy agents look less than human on this Ogden Whitney gem: the bald brute holding the hot-seat's helmet has fangs, and the head honcho's hands- seen smoking and drinking on the right- are hairy and clawed.

Suspense #25 (Dec 1952) Atlas actually licensed this title from CBS, whose radio show of the same name thrilled 1940's listeners with half-hour weird mystery melodramas. Such shows were a major influence on the style, structure, and subject matter of 1950's fantasy comics.

© ME

When it comes to esoteric comics, *Venus* just might be the strangest of them all. After all, how many comic books ran only nineteen issues, yet evolved into five distinct genre titles?

By Michelle Nolan

Beauty and The Marvel Beasts

Venus Was Several Comic Books in One!

WHEN IT COMES TO ESOTERIC COMICS, *Venus* just might be the strangest of them all. After all, how many comic books ran only 19 issues, yet evolved into five distinct genre titles?

If you collect comics about costume or super heroines, you have to include *Venus*. If you gather up girl/teen humor titles, you'll want early issues of *Venus*. Romance titles? There are at least three issues of *Venus* that no romance collection would be complete without.

As for science fiction or science fantasy? Yes, several mid-range issues of *Venus* are a must. Horror? The last five issues of *Venus* are among some of the grisliest horror comics of the pre-code period.

We haven't even yet touched on the genre of mythology, to which *Venus* also belongs. If you collect glamour girl comics, *Venus* is an absolute must. And as for good artists... well, Bill Everett drew some of the most intriguing art in all of comics for the last six issues.

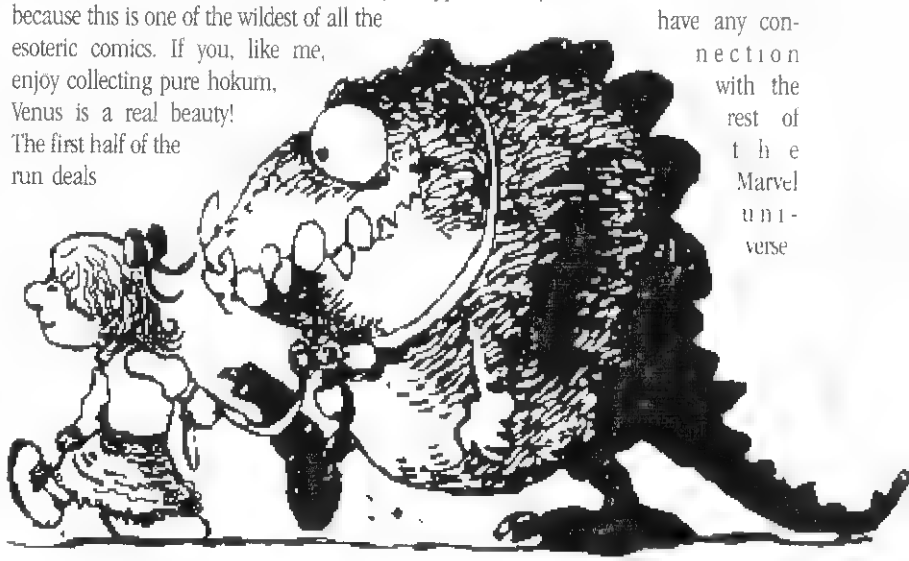
All that and more is to be discovered in the 19 issues of *Venus*, which was a comic book phenomenon unique not only to Marvel Comics, but to the entire industry.

Marvel (known as Timely in the 1940s) has a long corporate history of flooding the market with whatever happened to be selling at the time, be it super heroes, westerns, romance, science fiction, war, funny animals or horror. You name it and Marvel has published it...usually several dozen times over the last 50-plus years!

Venus, however, represents an attempt to take the same character and match her to whatever trend she seemed to fit best at the time. Unfortunately, each of her appearances in the different genres was so brief that the character never really had a chance for development, and so remains a largely forgotten oddity.

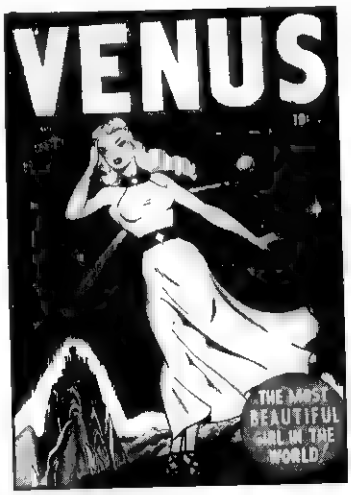
But Venus should not be forgotten, if only because this is one of the wildest of all the esoteric comics. If you, like me, enjoy collecting pure hokum, Venus is a real beauty! The first half of the run deals primarily with Venus's love for Whitney Hammond, the publisher of *Beauty Magazine*. Venus works as a editor/reporter for Hammond, who refuses to believe Venus really is the Goddess of Love but marvels (no pun intended) at how she deals with human emotions along with Whitney's secretary Della, Venus's scheming rival.

Ironically, *Venus* was the survivor of Marvel's failed experiment in super heroine titles at the close of the Golden Age. Ironically, however, she may be the least known of Marvel's heroines, since she appeared only in her own title and did not have any connection with the rest of the Marvel universe.



BURNING BURNING BURNING BURNING BURNING

Marvel's experiment in fantastic females is given only a few lines in Les Daniels' generally excellent book about the history of the company, which is understandable considering how obscure these comic books seem today. But Marvel's attempt to feature the femmes was significant nonetheless.



Venus #1 (Aug 1948) fits in well with both Marvel's "girl humor" titles and its brief flurry of super heroine comics.

The origins of that experiment were in the initial appearance of Miss America, Timely's first long-running heroine. Miss America, who had one of the most attractive costumes of any Golden Age character, debuted in *Marvel Mystery* #49 (November 1943) during the height of the patriotic hero craze at the midpoint of America's involvement in World War II. Interestingly, long after most of the other patriotic heroes and heroines had been retired, Miss America continued right on through, without missing an issue, almost to the end of *Marvel Mystery*'s long run. Her last appearance in *Marvel Mystery* was in #85 (February 1948), although there was one more to come.

By this time, however, Marvel had come up with another costumed heroine, and this one was indeed a fatal femme–the fondly remembered Blonde Phantom! She made her debut in a 17-page lead story, "The Atom Spells Doom", in *All-Select Comics* #11 (Fall 1946) and took over the title with #12 (Winter 1946/47). We're not counting Millie the Model's appearance as the Blonde Phantom in *Millie* #2 (October 1946), although that remains one of the more curious sidelights in comic book history (do you know of any other character who was "introduced" that way by a humor comic?).

The Blonde Phantom, a striking character and one of the more underdeveloped "good" characters in the history of comics, ran for six quarterly issues, then became bimonthly with #18 (July 1948) at the beginning of Marvel's brief flirtation with super heroines. Apparently, *Blonde Phantom* sold well enough–while the other heroic titles were on their last legs–that Marvel decided to give three heroines their own comics, even though titles such as *Captain America*, *Human Torch* and *Sub-Mariner* were on the way out.

The first issues of *Sun Girl*, *Namora* and, yes, *Venus* were all dated August 1948 as companions for the *Blonde Phantom* title. In addition, *Marvel Mystery*, which had added Blonde Phantom with #84 (October 1947), also added the Sun Girl strip in #88 (October 1948) for a three-issue run to accompany the Blonde Phantom. (A brief Sun Girl inventory story also appeared in *Marvel Tales* #97 after *Marvel Mystery* had been converted to an sf/horror title–yet another odd sidelight in the history of Marvel, which is loaded with them.)

So, for a six-month period, no fewer than five Marvel titles featured super heroines. But it was a brief flirtation, indeed, because *Sun Girl* and *Namora* were both gone with #3 (December 1948). Sun Girl also bowed out of *Marvel Mystery* with #90 (February 1949) and the Blonde Phantom was gone for good with #91 (April 1949). The next issue of *Marvel Mystery* would be the last. Likewise, *Blonde Phantom*'s own title bowed out with #22 (March 1949).

But *Venus*...ah, well, *Venus* survived! She didn't necessarily thrive, but she did survive. However, as if to debate the wisdom of comics featuring the females of fantasy, Marvel skipped an issue date and did not come back with *Venus* #4 until April 1949. But come back she did, and that issue marked the beginning of the transition from gentle girl humor stories (a la Millie the Model) to more serious themes, with the lead story entitled "Whom the Gods Would Destroy!". Now, does that

C B M
C H E C K L I S T

VENUS STORIES

Venus #1 (Aug 1948)
Untitled origin story (10 pgs.)
Untitled second story (12)

Venus #2 (Oct 1948)
"Way Out West!" (8 pgs.)
"Venus Stops the Presses!" (5 pgs.) "Between Two Worlds!" (10 pgs.)

Venus #3 Dec 1948)
"Venus Interviews the Handsomest Man in the World!" (10 pgs.) "The Day the Sun Stood Still!" (9 pgs.)

Venus #4 (Apr 1949)
"Whom the Gods Would Destroy!" (12 pgs.)
"It's All in the Mind" (6 pgs.)
"Oh, Doctor!" (6 pgs.)

Venus #5 (Jun 1949)
"Her Perilous Quest!" (Chapter One, 7 pgs.) "Defeat!" (Chapter Two, 5 pgs.) "The End of the Quest!" (Chapter Three, 7 pgs.)

Venus #6 (Aug 1949)
"The Earth Is in Danger!" (Chapter One, 7 pgs.)
"Face-to-Face with the King of Evil." (Chapter Two, 5 pgs.)
"The Wrath of a Goddess!" (Chapter Three, 7 pgs.)

Venus #7 (Nov 1949)
"The Romance That Could Not Be!" (Chapter One, 7 pgs.)
"The Dreadful Decision!" (Chapter Two, 8 pgs.)

Venus #8 (Feb 1950)
"The Love Trap!" (Chapter One, 7 pgs.) "Prisoner of Love!" (Chapter Two, 5 pgs.) "Love Conquers All!" (Ch. 3, 5 pgs.)

Venus #9 (May 1950, 52 pages) First Story "The Man She Dared Not Love"
"A Pact with the Devil!" (Chapter One, 7 pgs.)
"The Gods in Danger!" (Chapter Two, 5 pgs.)
"Back to Earth!" (Chapter Three, 7 pgs.) Second Story: "Beauty for Everyone!" "A Dream Is Born!" (Chapter One, 5 pgs.)
"The Gods Look Down!" (Chapter Two, 5 pgs.)

Venus #10 (Jul 1950, 52 pages) First Story. "Venus and the Son of Satan!" "The Devil

sound like a Stan Lee title? You bet it does!

The two backup stories in issue #4 were humorous, however, as were the covers to #4 and #5, following up on the first three covers (the issues that sold concurrently with *Sun Girl* and *Namora* during the second half of 1948). The Venus epic in #5, however, was a serious (well, we use that word advisedly) three-part, 19-page tales of gods and goddesses, good and evil, and love conquering all. It didn't match the humorous cover at all (see the *Gerber Photo-Journal*, which features all 19 *Venus* covers), but that was just another oddity in the odd history of *Venus*. The fifth issue also began the practice of running filler romance stories, which ran through issue #9. *Venus* is thus a must for the romance completists (all six of them) of the comic collecting world.

With issue #6 (August 1949), the integration of covers, themes and stories became complete for the first time. The title atop the logo was "Romantic Tales of Fantasy", which lasted three issues and was obviously an attempt to tie in to the romance comic craze, which would peak early in 1950 before becoming a victim of the "love glut". The cover blurb was "The Wrath of a Goddess", which was also the title of the third chapter of another epic 19-page tale. Now you know where Stan Lee got his practice for all those titles he used in the early Thor stories of the 1960's!

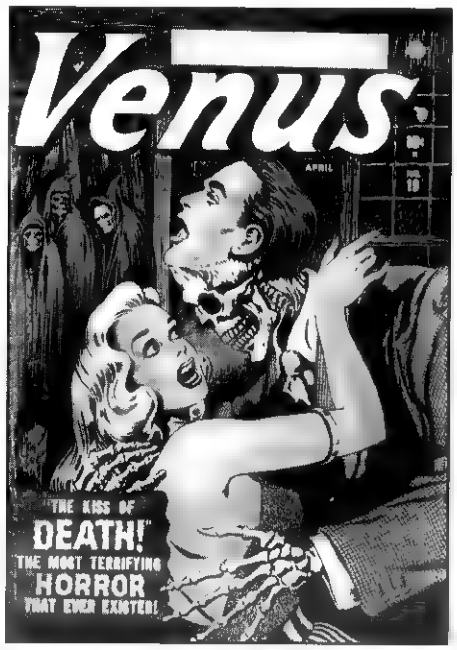
Roman and Greek gods and goddesses, along with other Satanic figures of evil including Satan himself, were freely used in the pages of *Venus*, along with references to numerous famous females, legendary or historic. It was far too much of a mishmash to thoroughly cover here, but suffice to say that if you have any interest in mythology or history at all, you'll find the juxtapositions both funny and fascinating.

Issues #7 (November 1949) and #8 (February 1950), published during the height of Marvel's own "love glut", had pretty painted covers that would lead readers to believe they were romance comics. And, were it not for the fantasy elements in the stories, they could indeed be classified as such. But once again, however, it was time for *Venus* to make a switch. Marvel suffered an implosion in 1950 and early in the year discontinued 25 of the 30 romance titles it began late in 1949 and early in 1950. Marvel led all publishers in 1949 with 272 comics, a whopping 44 issues more than runner-up DC, But Marvel dropped into fourth in 1950 with 188, below Fawcett, the always stable DC, and Dell (Thanks to Southern California index king Dan Stevenson for those handy counts at a moment's notice!) Marvel made almost all of its remaining titles quarterlies in 1950 before resuming its traditional bi-monthly (and soon monthly) publication pace.

So pretending *Venus* was a romance comic was out. In its place came heavy duty mythology with the publication of the landmark #9 (May 1950), which once again used the ever-generic title "Whom the Gods Destroy!" on the cover. That title was nowhere to be found in either of the two stories in the comic book, which was the first of the only two 52-page issues of *Venus* (Marvel briefly went back to the 52-page format before returning to 36 pages for good).

Venus #9 is of particular sentimental value to me, because it was one of the few 1945-54 comic books I found during my earliest childhood

Venus #19 (Apr 1952) presents a cover that is an amazing contrast to the cover of #1, less than four years later! Has any other character's title gone through so many changes in so short a time?



Strikes!" (Chapter One, 5 pgs.) "Terror on Earth!" (Chapter Two, 5 pgs.) Second Story "The Plot That Failed!" (7 pgs.) Third Story Overall Story Untitled "Journey to the Moon!" (Chapter One, 4 pgs.) "Trapped on the Moon!" (Chapter Two, 6 pgs.)

Venus #11 (Nov 1950) "The End of the World." (12 pgs.) "Beyond the Third Dimension." (6 pgs.)

Venus #12 (Feb 1951) "Trapped in the Land of Terror" (12 pgs.) "The Lost World" (6 pgs.)

Venus #13 (Apr 1951, Everett cover) "The King of the Living Dead" (7 pgs.) "The Last Day on Earth!" (5 pgs.) "The Creeping Death!" (6 pgs.)

Venus #14 (Jun 1951) "Fountain of Death" (8 pgs. by Everett) "Hangman's Horror" (5 pgs. by Everett) "Venus Meets the Lady Killer" (6 pgs. by Everett) Venus #15 (Aug 1951, Everett cover) "The Graveyard Waxworks" (8 pgs. by Everett) "The Day That Venus Vanished" (6 pgs.) "The Living Dolls" (5 pgs. by Everett)

Venus #16 (Oct 1951, Everett cover) "Where Gargoyles Dwell!" (8 pgs. by Everett) "The Ashes of Death!" (7 pgs. by Everett) "The House of Terror!" (5 pgs. by Everett)

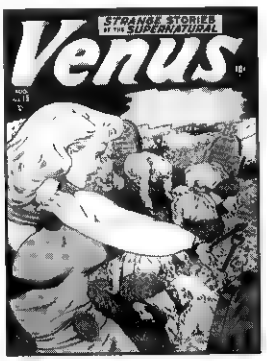
Venus #17 (Dec 1951, Everett cover, first Atlas globe on cover) "Tower of Death!" (6 pgs.) "The Cartoonist's Calamity!" (5 pgs. by Everett) "The Stone Man" (8 pgs. by Everett)

Venus #18 (Feb 1952, Everett cover) "The Sea ed Specters" (6 pgs. by Everett) "The Mad Mountain" (5 pgs. by Everett) "Tidal Wave of Terror" (8 pgs. by Everett)

Venus #19 (Apr 1952 Everett cover) "The Kiss of Death!" (7 pgs. by Everett) "Demons from the Deep!" (6 pgs. by Everett) "The Box of Doom!" (6 pgs. by Everett)

forays through the three used book stores in my hometown. I was 10 years old in 1958 when I found this issue (give or take a year) and I was enchanted with this comic, since nothing like it was on the stands at the time. I must have read this issue 10 times over; my childhood copy became so tattered that many years later I bought a replacement copy for my collection. I don't know who drew it, but it's filled with marvelous images of fantasy. The two stories, "The Man She Dared Not Love" and "Beauty for Everyone", make this the most enchanting issue of the entire run. If you want only one issue of *Venus*, this is the issue to get.

Venus #15 (Aug 1951) features a Bill Everett cover as the series becomes a full-fledged horror title.



Venus #9 (May 1950) contains two of the best Venus stories, dealing primarily with mythology and romance.

Venus #10 is also an excellent issue, the only one with three separate, full-length stories. The contrast in themes is interesting: separate battles with Satan, Venus's rival Della and a mad scientist. If you can't find #9, this also will do nicely as an example of the wonderful hokum this series represents.

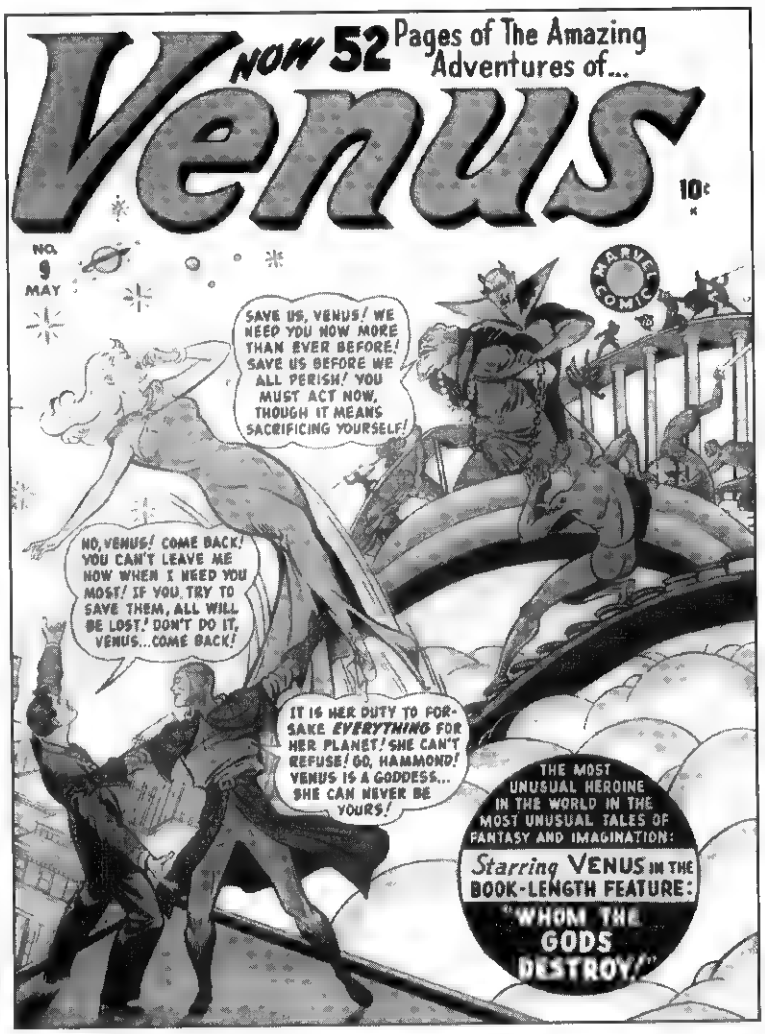
With #11 (November 1950), Venus became a tough character concerned only with investigation into elements of the weird/science fantasy/horror in her role as a reporter for *Beauty Magazine* (don't ask me what a reporter for Beauty Magazine was doing investigating the supernatural!). The fillers were science-fiction in #11-13 and horror in #14-19. Once again, this was in line with Marvel's policy of following the hot trend of the moment, and horror became all the rage beginning in 1950-51 (after horror's earlier appearances in a few comics of the 1947-49 period, which were nowhere near as gruesome as the horror comics of the 1951-54 era).

Most of those Venus stories are grim indeed. She became much more hard-bitten and her romance with Whitney Hammond was less and less a focus of the stories, until it virtually disappeared in most of the later tales. Marvel picked the perfect artist to illustrate the *Venus* horror stories: Bill Everett (covers #13, 15-19; interiors #14-19). He frequently used stories dealing with water, his artistic specialty, and he perfectly melded the beauty of Venus with the horror of her opponents.

Whitney Hammond appeared in the stories until the end, but Della vanished much sooner. Della didn't appear at all after her role in a story in #16 (October 1951) entitled "The Ashes of Death". It's no wonder–in a twist that must have made Lee (or whoever wrote the story), laugh out loud, Venus had Della play a decoy while trying to foil a madman intent on cremating beautiful women! Della survived, but she retired for good. In addition to being one of the grimmest stories in the history of comics–the madman apparently was the devil himself–this is one of the least logical with regard to the admittedly loose continuity of the series.

Only a year earlier, Della was scheming madly to foil Whitney Hammond's love for Venus. Now she was willingly taking orders from both of them, and playing decoy to a madman yet! Perhaps you need to read the entire series to get the flavor of this, but if they had had a reader's page in those days, one only wonders what the reaction might have been! But then, the philosophy in those days was a lot looser. Anything went, including (eventually) Della!

By the way, there's a hidden gem in *Venus* #17 (December 1951) near the end of the run. Everett drew a wonderful little five-page parody of cartooning entitled "The Cartoonist's Calamity", complete with the brief appearance of a hero who looked like the Sub-Mariner's distant cousin. This little-known and highly collectible Everett classic is one of those comic discoveries that really puts the fun back into the hobby! Thanks for reading... see you in the next issue of *CBM*! ■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Starring VENUS IN THE BOOK-LENGTH FEATURE:
"WHOM THE GODS DESTROY!"

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Michelle Nolan is a nationally recognized collector and researcher of comic books from the '40s through the '60s. She has one of the most extensive collections of 1950's comic books in the United States. In real life Michelle works as a freelance journalist

A conversation with Marvel legend...

Joe Sinnott

By Gene Lomoriello

Some two years into his retirement, Joe Sinnott cannot stop working. Although he says his 25,000-30,000 pages of pencils and inks after 45 years in the comics business have left him "a little jaded" toward superheroes, Sinnott continues to ink the Sunday Spider Man newspaper strips penciled by Fantastic Four penciler Paul Ryan.

A long-time baseball fan, Sinnott prefers to relax in his Saugerties, New York home by sketching former Giants players or by preparing for his monthly Bing Crosby radio show. Sinnott has thousands of pieces of Crosby memorabilia and recordings in his collection to sort through as he prepares his show each month.

Joe also enjoys sitting and talking about the history of comic books from his vantage point as one of the all-time great pencilers, inkers, and cover artists.

It is ironic that his current work for Marvel as the Sunday Spider-Man inker is a collaboration with the current Fantastic Four penciler, considering Sinnott is perhaps most famous as the inker of the legendary Jack Kirby's *Fantastic Four* run, one of the highlights of Kirby's career. But it is Kirby's Fantastic Four successor, who Sinnott also inked, to whom he likens Paul Ryan. "Paul puts a lot in his work. He's an excellent illustrator," said Sinnott. "He's from the John Buscema school. That's the way I draw"

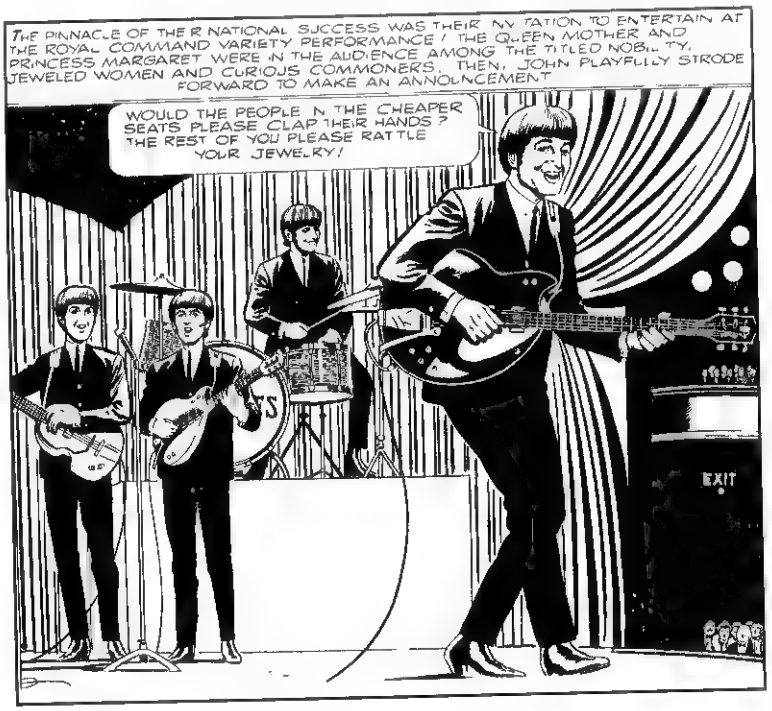
But it is actually the Burne Hogarth School from which Sinnott graduated. He's worked at Marvel longer than any other artist, but he has not worked exclusively for Marvel. He also penciled biography comics for Ohio-based *Treasure Chest* in the 1950s and 1960s, including comics on Eisenhower, Kennedy, Babe Ruth, and General Douglas MacArthur. "Some of the best work I did in comics," he said of them. He also worked for *Classics Illustrated* and Dell, and it is a Dell work of which he is perhaps most proud. Sinnott penciled and inked the 1964 *Life of The Beatles* one-shot.

He also inked a couple of landmark Marvel Comics that were somehow mistakenly credited to Dick Ayers, another great prolific penciler and inker from Marvel's early days. Those books are *Journey into Mystery* #83, which introduced Thor; and *Fantastic Four* #5, the first appearance of Dr. Doom. Incidentally, Sinnott says the pirate-garbed Thing in *Fantastic Four* #5 best reveals that a space pirate called Pilldorr from a *Strange Tales* #94 story is the prototype for the Thing.

Sinnott's work is lauded by Marvel Comics Publisher Stan Lee. "Joe is one of the great guys of our time," said Lee. "It seems to me he's been working with us forever."

Lee said Sinnott could make any penciler look

good. "His inking was so beautiful that I was delighted with it. Any artist he inked, Joe made his or her work look better," Lee said. "Clean, pleasant to look at, dramatic, it reproduced clearly. I almost never asked him to re-do anything."


THE PINNACLE OF THEIR NATIONAL SUCCESS WAS THEIR INVITATION TO ENTERTAIN AT THE ROYAL COMMAND VARIETY PERFORMANCE! THE QUEEN MOTHER AND PRINCESS MARGARET WERE IN THE AUDIENCE AMONG THE TITLED NOBILITY, JEWELED WOMEN AND CURIOUS COMMONERS. THEN, JOHN PLAYFULLY STRODE FORWARD TO MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT
WOULD THE PEOPLE IN THE CHEAPER SEATS PLEASE CLAP THEIR HANDS? THE REST OF YOU PLEASE RATTLE YOUR JEWELRY!
EXIT

John Lennon gently mocks the wealthy elite in this panel from the 1964 Sinnott-drawn "Life of The Beatles".

Bing Crosby collector Joe Sinnott draws a double caricature of "Der Bingle".

While Lee said there was never any such thing as an official Marvel house style, he said Sinnott's work was the best example of Lee's credo for Marvel Comics: "As much excitement and integrity into every panel as clearly and dramatically as possible."

"I never really tried to get any penciler or inker to copy another," Lee said. "Joe's inking was just the best in his style. It's very similar to Romita's style."

Lee also remembers Sinnott as a "very, very good penciler" whose work was "so sharp, so beautifully delineated, you could see what was going on at a glance."

"I just can't speak too highly of him," Lee added. "He's dependable, he meets deadlines and he's good. And he's one of the nicest human beings ever to walk this earth, and I've been blessed to work with many great great guys."

Lee said he had two policies regarding Joe Sinnott's role with Marvel. "I gave him the best artists to ink–those artists deserved his inking. And I'd give him weak artists occasionally to help them look better."

Of course, someone Lee frequently gave to Sinnott to ink because he was a great penciler was Jack Kirby. "They were a great team, perhaps one of the greatest," Lee said of Sinnott's inks over Kirby's pencils. "But Jack's penciling was so magnificent he looked good no matter who inked him."

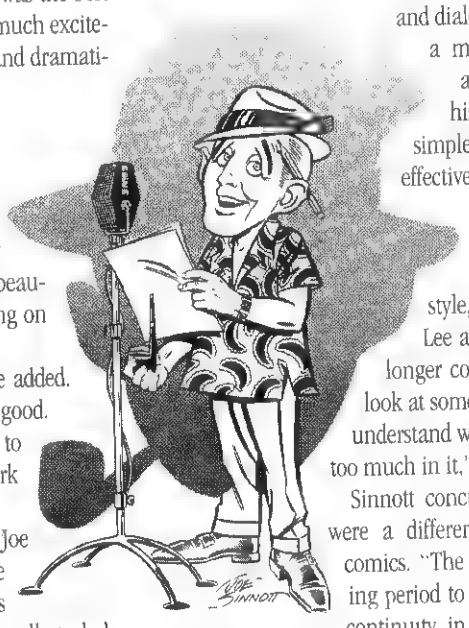
While Lee and many others agree Sinnott inked Kirby better than most anyone, Sinnott is also quick to say Kirby's work was an inker's pleasure. "I would often open his pencils and be in awe. They looked like they could've been printed the way they were," Sinnott said. "If he was doing buttons on a shirt, he'd have four button holes on for the thread."

"Kirby was not an illustrator; he was a pure cartoonist. Comics was made for Jack Kirby, and Jack was made for comics," Sinnott added. "Kirby was the most dynamic, number one illustrator of comics of all time."

But there were elements in Kirby's work that Sinnott would have to address regularly in inking him, he said. "Jack made heavy-legged girls, and he couldn't do ears," Sinnott said.

Ironically, the two met only once, at a 1976 Marvel art convention. For that matter, at the same convention, Stan Lee didn't recognize Sinnott when they first saw each other, Sinnott said. Though Sinnott lived in New York City from 1949 to 1951 to attend Hogarth's Cartoonists and Illustrators School, in the 45 years he worked for Marvel, there was a 26-year span in which Sinnott did not go to New York City once.

But he has clear memories of his early visits to Stan Lee's office. "Every time I went in, he was working. Stan would type and talk," Sinnott said. "He typed on yellow legal paper that he blocked into panels. He typed in captions and dialogue, and he kept it to a minimum. He was an artist's writer. Maybe his stories were a little simple, but they were always effective. He knew how to tell a story with as few words as possible."



That storytelling style, however, is one both Lee and Sinnott think is no longer common. "Even today, I look at some books and it's hard to understand what's going on. There's too much in it," Lee said

Sinnott concurs that 1950s comics were a different world from today's comics. "The 1950s was an interesting period to work in. There was no continuity in those days. Five- and six-page stories were complete unto themselves," he said.

Sinnott also remembers late 1957 to early 1958, when Atlas Comics suspended operations for six months. In 1957, page rates, which were based on sales, plummeted

from $44 per page to $21 per page, Sinnott said.

He also remembers the early days of the Comics Code Authority. A story titled "Sara," written by Lee and penciled and inked by Sinnott, was held up before a Senate Committee as an example of the "dangerous" comics of the era, Sinnott recalls. "The books became so unbelievable (after the code)," Sinnott said. "Shooting and falling couldn't be in the same panel. There were no speedlines, no splat allowed."

And there's also lots more that Joe Sinnott remembers, as the following question and answer session reveals.

Gene: *When and where were you born, Joe?*

Joe: In Saugerties, New York, on October 16, 1926.

Gene: *So you've lived all your life here?*

Joe: That's right- except for being in the service during WW-II and three years at the Cartoonists and Illustrators School in New York City.

Gene: *So how did you get started in illustration?*

Joe: I always drew as a kid. I copied the comic strips: Smilin' Jack, Terry and the Pirates, Prince Valiant, and Flash Gordon. Those were my four favorites. So I always wanted to be an illustrator, like Norman Rockwell. But I was having a good time playing ball, so I put off school for three years. I worked in a cement plant where my father had worked. But by 1949 I realized that I had to go to school, and then I saw an ad for Burne Hogarth's Cartoonists School.

So I took some samples of my strip-style art and showed them to Hogarth. He appeared overwhelmed, and I thought he was kidding. He said, "You'd do well here," and I thought it was a come-on to get students to enroll. But he was on the level and really did see promise in my work. Considering I'd done the stuff on shirt-board with a post office pen, it wasn't too bad for a kid. I was around 21.

So I took the course and enjoyed it. Tom Gill was one of my teachers, and I collaborated with him on the Lone Ranger and other Dell assignments. That work taught me more than the classes, although Hogarth was a brilliant teacher and a fantastic artist. He would dazzle us by standing there in front of the class and drawing a saber-tooth tiger right out of his head- in the most dynamic pose possible...

Then in 1950 I took my stuff to Stan Lee. He gave me a two page Western, and when I brought it back he liked it and gave me more. Atlas also published crime, war, and fantasy- all of which I did. Atlas really got into fantasy and horror until the Code came along in late-1954 and almost literally killed the industry. The sales dropped so low that many of the better artists left the field. But some of us held on...

So when Atlas suspended publication, I went over to *Treasure Chest*. They also had Reed Crandall working for them–it was a good title. I specialized in biographies: Babe Ruth, MacArthur, Eisenhower, the Wright Brothers...

Then when Atlas came back in late–1958 I was right

THE PRE-CODE FANTASY ART OF

Joe Sinnott

The pre-Code years were extraordinarily conducive to the production of excellent comic art, with a lot of companies offering enough work to support a large number of talented artists. And I think particularly of Stan Lee's amazing achievement at Atlas- his scripts and editing set the company's tone in all genres, and he also organized the network of free-lance artists who helped make Atlas fantasy such a four-color feast. One of those artists was Joe Sinnott. Joe was especially adept at science fiction, with a style similar to, though not derivative of, Wally Wood's. The style is clean, intense, luminous, with heavy outlines to the objects- and the S-F staples of aliens, space scenes, and futuristic machinery all emerged done to a spellbinding turn.

Another awesome thing about pre-Code Atlas fantasy is that many of those artists–Sinnott included- can be seen coming on board around 1951, still a little rough around the edges, and in most cases, quite young. In 1952 they defined their individual approaches and filled the Atlas pages with the thrill of these newly-forged illustrative abilities. Joe Sinnott produced a wealth of material. All of the art features Joe inking his own pencils for that pure Sinnott style.

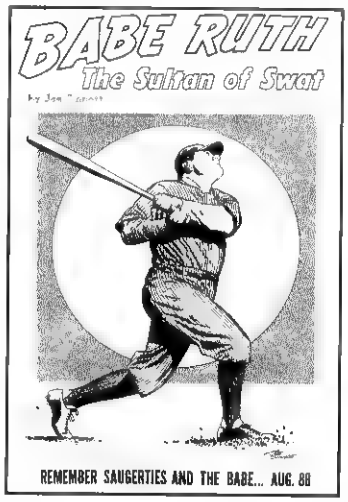
Although Sinnott continued to refine his style, it was already firmly established by 1952, as three stories cover-dated February 1952 demonstrate. "The Four Walls" from *Journey Into Unknown Worlds* #9 is a finely-rendered masterpiece of sci-fi. The splash of the astronaut crash-landing on Mars is superb–as are the months of living in a Martian house which turn him into a Martian. All is conveyed with perfect over-the-top comic art, which is to say it stands on its own yet also keeps and expands the narrative line. "The Ones Who Laugh" from *Astonishing* #8 is almost as good, as a pompous college professor finds out that aliens have invaded Earth. "The Man Who Vanished" from *Marvel Tales* #105 is also solid- the story of the creepy caretaker of an even creepier garden- it's spooky.

Other Sinnott classics include *Spellbound* #16's "Behind the Door" and *Journey Into Unknown Worlds* #21's "The Most Hated Man in the World". The first yarn features a "man who conquered death" story, and the second one offers more weird aliens and an interplanetary atomic war- both are cover-dated August 1953. "Escape to Earth" from *Uncanny Tales* #15 (December 1953) is pull-no-punches S-F satire, detailing the true fate of colonists shot into space from an overcrowded planet. And most of the other Sinnott-drawn stories are high quality, too- crisp, colorful, and exciting. Joe Sinnott was a first-string player on the Atlas team when they were producing the greatest fantasy comics ever published.

—Pat S. Calhoun

there. Stan and Jack Kirby made a real thing of those alien creature stories- it caught on. And Don Heck did a lot of great work; he's a favorite of mine.

Then they started up the *Fantastic Four, Hulk* and *Spider-Man*. Soon I was inking the *FF* every month, but I still managed to do the Beatles book for Dell in 1964, and some *Treasure Chest* work. And I did a lot of Thor, working with John Buscema after Kirby left. He was a fine artist as well.



Gene: *What was your favorite job done with Jack Kirby?*

Joe: It was all great! I liked Kirby's villains and secondary characters. And the Thing was the best character- Stan deserves a lot of the credit here for a great plot element (the Thing unable to return to his human form). But Dr. Doom, Galactus, and the Silver Surfer- wow!

Gene: *Who were your early influences?*

Joe: Well, Milt Caniff, Alex Raymond, and Hal Foster, as mentioned. And they all seemed to peak around 1939, when I was reading them.

Gene: *What about today's artists?*

Joe: There's a lot of beautiful rendering. But they don't seem to believe in white space- which I think is very important to panel layout. There's a lot that's overdone. The old stuff is simpler, often cruder, but seems to have more charm. At Atlas in the 1950s you'd go in and Stan would hand you a script from this pile... he'd have written it on yellow legal paper. It could be war, Western, science fiction- but it was never boring. The horror stuff was fun- graveyards, ghosts, mummies...

Gene: *When doing the FF, did you ever have to confer with Stan or Jack during the progress of a story?*

Joe: No... which is amazing when you consider the amount of work, 17 years or so, and the tight deadlines. But Stan and Jack were both real good at providing "margin notes" to help the inker along.

Gene: *And what are you drawing now?*

Joe: I ink the Spider-Man Sunday strip, working with Stan Lee and Paul Ryan. Paul Ryan's a great penciler. And I do my baseball drawings. I enjoy sports- baseball in particular. And I still do promotional material for comic books- I just don't want to be tied down doing long stories anymore. And I'm a Bing Crosby collector- that takes some time and energy, but I enjoy it.

Gene: *How did you get away from penciling and into inking only?*

Joe: Stan called me (around 1960)... he needed someone to ink a Kirby monster story–. I'd been inking my own pencils- which I preferred–but I did it, Stan liked it, and when the FF came along Stan chose me to be Jack's regular inker. It was more money, and I didn't have to do the reference work of penciling, so it was a work decision. I had a family to support. And I was still penciling and inking my Treasure Chest work. But- hey- I think Stan is the best. He's so thoughtful- sending me gifts when I was in the hospital, keeping in touch... Hogarth is like that too- they're both grand fellows as well as artists.

Gene: *This has been a great interview.*

Joe: It's been a pleasure talking with you. ■

Sinnott loves baseball and drawing the great players. Here, he honors the Sultan of Swat, Babe Ruth.

Somewhere in deep space, the Silver Surfer and the Thing engage in super-combat, expertly choreographed by Joe Sinnott.

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LOU FINE'S BLACK CONDOR!

OUT OF THE CLOUDS SWOOPS THE GREATEST THREAT TO CRIME THE UNDERWORLD HAS EVER KNOWN!

IN THE AFTERMATH OF SUPERMAN, 1939 AND 1940 SAW the explosion of the genre of heroes in comic books who possessed special, yes, "super" abilities. Many had incredible strength, while others battled evil-doers by flame or super-speed. Some had exceptional athletic ability or even expertise with a bow-and-arrow. Despite the successful lawsuit by DC which put a quick end to "Wonderman" (the first imitator of Superman), DC was unable to stem the inevitable and subtle variations of "superheroes" which were duplicated and imitated its legendary stars in the early comic book marketplace.

In January 1940 DC introduced "Hawkman" in *Flash Comics* #1. Other flying heroes, imitating this "Icarian" character, soon followed, such as Timely's Red Raven, and Centaur's Airman in *Keen Detective Funnies* (August 1940). But the earliest flying competitor to Hawkman was a wingless man who could fly- The Black Condor.

The Black Condor first appeared in *Crack Comics* #1 (May 1940) from Quality Comics. Quality Comics, formed by Everett "Busy" Arnold, showcased some of the greatest of the Golden Age artists such as Lou Fine, William Eisner, Jack Cole, Reed Crandall, and Paul Gustavson. As a company, the Quality art staff produced, perhaps, the finest artwork of the Golden Age: the covers of Fine's early *Hit Comics*, the uniqueness of Cole's Plastic Man in *Police Comics* and

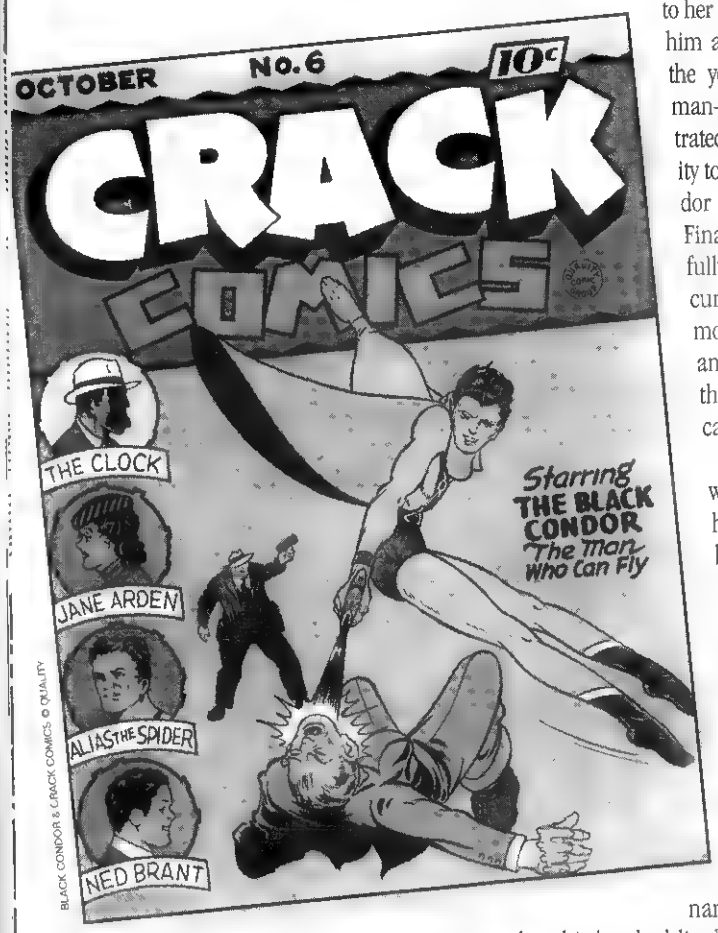
BY JON BERK

Midnight in *Smash Comics*, or Blackhawk in *Military Comics*, or Eisner/Fine's other features, Dollman in *Feature Comics* and The Ray in *Smash Comics*, or the underrated characters and art appearing in *National Comics* courtesy of Eisner, Fine, and others.

Few of the Black Condor stories were memorable for their story content. What was memorable was that many of the early adventures were drawn by Louis Kenneth Fine, one of the truly distinctive Golden Age artists. The art for the Black Condor used innovative layouts and was unconfined by conventional panels. While by today's standards much of this would appear routine (except for Fine's superior drawing talent), in 1940 his artwork was breaking ground for this new storytelling medium. Obviously, Fine was, in this fashion, influenced by Will Eisner, and, perhaps, Eisner by Fine. (Please refer to Eisner's work in *Detective Picture Stories* and Uncle Sam in *National Comics*.)

Cond-Origin

The Black Condor finds his origin in Mongolia. He is an infant, named Dick Grey, Jr., who accompanies his parents on an archaeological party that is set upon by outlaws. All in the party are ruthlessly massacred save the Grey infant. A condor comes to the bloody scene and takes the infant back to her nest and raises him as her own. As the years pass, the man-child is frustrated by his inability to fly as his condor brothers. Finally, after carefully studying air currents, body motion balance and levitation, the man-child can soar and fly.



Crack Comics #6 (Oct 1940) The Condor takes out a thug with his black ray gun, while the thug's partner tries to get a shot at the shifting form of "the man who can fly".

One day, while foraging, he is set upon by a band of eagles who outnumber him. He plunges to the ground where he is found and nursed back to health by a hermit named Father Pierre. Recognizing that this boy had lived with the birds and because of his black hair, Father Pierre dubs him The Black Condor! Father Pierre schools the lad in the ways of man, but dies soon after. As Father Pierre is dying, he urges the lad to use his special gift for good. As the first issue closes, The Black Condor vows to use his gift of flight to aid man and to wage a relentless war on evil.

The adventures of The Black Condor continue with such lead-in phrases as: "The Black Condor sweeps from the sky on the side of right and justice in a world of evil..." (*Crack Comics* #5), or, "Out of the clouds swoops the greatest threat of crime the underworld has ever known! The Black Condor crushes his vicious prey..." (*Crack* #9), or "A soaring relentless righter of wrongs with a fierce sense of justice is the Black Condor..." (*Crack* #13). Actually, the Condor had two distinct careers, one as a general hero-adventurer (issues #1–#10) and one as an United States Senator as his alter-ego.

The Super Senator

The pre-senator exploits were fairly exotic, taking the Condor from Mongolia to India to America to hidden islands and valleys. In these adventures he would battle petty jewel thieves as well as villains such as Sihn Fang-who uses his death ray to lay barren a fertile valley town so he can take it over. A Condor adventure took him from Ceylon on a crewless ship to "Danger Island", where he battled giant eagles. Magic amulets and kite-flying men wielding lightning form the content of other fantastic tales where his black ray gun is his salvation more often than his flying prowess.

With issue #11 (March 1941), the locale and content of the stories dramatically shift. Senator Tom Wright is being heavily pressured by lobbyist Jaspar Crow, to vote for a particular "pork barrel" appropriations bill. Despite the pressure, Wright vows to vote his principles. Crow sends some of his boys to "persuade" Wright to change his mind. Still refusing, Wright is shot and dumped onto the road. The Black Condor comes onto the scene shortly after and notes that the dead senator looks exactly like him. He decides to assume Wright's identity and cast the crucial vote. (Hey, I never claimed this all makes sense.)

The Black Condor, now a senator, rallys his fellow senators to vote against the appropriations bill, and thwarts the machinations of Jaspar Crow. The Condor decides to assume the identity of the senator, with only Dr. Foster, uncle of Wright's fiancee, knowing his true identity. Even Wright's fiancee, Wendy Foster, does not notice the difference. The Condor's alter-ego "disguise" was as clever as Superman's-namely a pair of glasses. However, this must have been quite effective since Wendy never noticed the similarity, although she constantly wished that Wright could be more like the Black Condor.

Many of the ensuing stories involved political intrigue, often with the ubiquitous "political and industrial tyrant" Jaspar Crow as the main antagonist. The economic goals of Crow slowly became more global as the stories reflected the war conflict. Crow, more often than not, was in league with fifth columnists and Nazis. While #18 (November 1941) has

the Condor bombing mysterious "U" boat submarines, issue #19 directly depicts Nazis–who have kidnapped President Roosevelt and had a double substituted In issue #23 (May 1942), The Black Condor "officially" joined the war effort by declaring, "To the defenses of democracy, I pledge my utmost power; to the victory of freedom for all time, I pledge my life." Foiling sabotage and protecting American inventors and their plans from Nazis became the common story plots of the ensuing issues. However, with the departure of Lou Fine in issue #24 and the advent of "Captain Triumph" in #27, the Black Condor suffered serious reversals, and he swooped no more after *Crack* #31 (October 1943).

The Black Condor was in good company- sharing *Crack Comics* with Paul Gustavson's "Alias the Spider", George Brenner's "The Clock", and others. The Black Condor alternated as a cover feature with "The Clock" until issue #20 (January 1942), continuing as the sole cover feature until displaced with the inaugural appearance of "Captain Triumph" in #27 (January 1943). The covers were drawn primarily by Gill Fox and George Brenner, who was an early editor for Quality. (There is no question but had Fine drawn the covers, as well as the stories for the Black Condor, that these books would be on everyone's "want list". Reproduction of a few of the interior pages of these scarce books–particularly the wonderful pages from *Crack* #6- hopefully will fuel the interest of Golden Age collectors in this character and title. Note–the splash page for #12 is "reversed" and used as the cover for #14.)

THE RAY
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SMASH COMICS
On Sale July 19th
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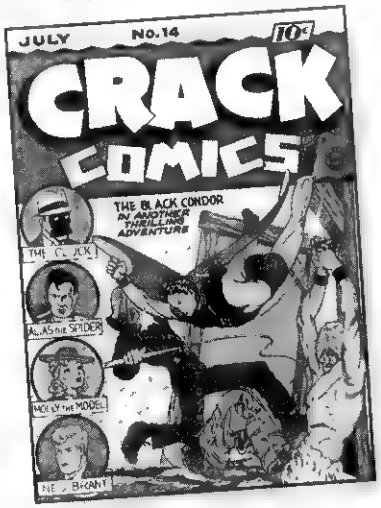
ESPIONAGE WITH BLACK X, THE GREAT BOZO, THE ROBOT
WINGS WENDALL, THE PURPLE TRIO...
AND CHIC CARTER, MAGNO, PLUS OTHER SLAM BANG COMICS!

Louis K. Fine

Although The Black Condor, as a character, is only of marginal import, his principal artist, Louis K. Fine, is not. The first twenty four adventures were primarily drawn (and, in some cases, written) by Lou Fine. Fine was, unquestionably, one of the finest of the Golden Age artists. Each of the covers he created (through the Iger-Eisner Shop or on staff at Quality) are classic in composition and draftsmanship. There are the dynamic and busy Schomburg covers created for Timely, Nedor, and others; there are the powerful covers of Kirby and Simon, the Rockwellesque covers of Flessel, the whimsical cartoony covers of Cole and Beck, and the beautifully rendered covers by Raboy, but there is something intrinsically alluring and intoxicating about the elegant and lyrical covers of Lou Fine.

Fine received his art training at New York's Grand Central Art School and Pratt Institute. He originally worked out of the Eisner-Iger shop where he produced some of his earliest work for Fiction House and *Jumbo Comics* under the name "Jack Cortez". (check out the covers for *Jumbo* #9 and #10 or some of the marvelous Planet Comics covers). He also drew "The Flame" for Fox Publications under the name "Basil Berold". For Fox he created many memorable covers, including *Wonderworld* #3-#11, *Science* #1-#3, *Weird Comics* #1-#2, *Fantastic Comics* #1-#5, and *Mystery Men* #1-#6 (each with their classic covers for the respective third issue) and *Mystery Men Comics* #8 (his only "Blue Beetle" MM cover).



Crack Comics #14 (Jul 1941) The Black Condor flies in fist-first to smash the man in the red hood, on a cover transposed from Fine's splash panel for Crack #12.

The back cover of Crack Comics #4 (Aug 1940) was a house ad for the debut of the Ray in Smash Comics. This ad also appeared as the back cover to Hit Comics #3 and National Comics #3.

After a falling-out between Eisner and Fox following the "Wonderman" debacle, Fine followed Eisner as he packaged material for Everett Arnold and Quality Comics. It was here that Fine created, perhaps, the finest series of Golden Age covers– *Hit Comics* #1-#17. (Interestingly, while the early Quality title covers had side-circle portraits of the other characters found within the issue, Everett gave Fine the full cover for his *Hit Comics* covers.)

William Eisner, for whom Fine initially worked, stated, "I had respect for his towering kind of draftsmanship. He was the epitome of the honest draftsman." Perhaps the most telling commentary about the quality and impact of Fine's work was made by the great Gil Kane:

"A great event in my life was the purchase of a Fox published book called Wonderworld Comics *#3. It was the first time I ever saw the artwork of Louie Fine, who did the cover for that issue. It absolutely changed my life... I went crazy over Lou's stuff. Lou Fine was one of the few I feel comfortable saying was a major influence for me. What most don't realize is that all the rest of the comic publishing community were literally slaves waiting for each new issue of anything Fine would do... as an instructional course in "how to do" comics."*

The winning combination of an early Golden Age character and the craft of a master artist, make the Black Condor issues of *Crack Comics* a must for any true Golden Age fan ■

LOU FINE *an artist's artist*

BY JON BERK

Although not the most prolific of the Golden Age artists, Lou Fine has left his indelible imprint as one of the finest draftsman of his time. In a real sense, Fine was an 'artist's artist'. Superior drawing skills coupled with an uncanny sense of composition (see *Hit Comics* #8), Fine's work continues to be admired and collected by Golden Age enthusiasts. He had the unique ability to bring motion to the drawn page (see, for example, *Jumbo* #10 or *Hit Comics* #9). There is something intoxicating about the elegant and lyrical covers created by Lou Fine. In addition to his technical drawing prowess, the rich and unique colors chosen by Fine for his covers (how often does one see pink used effectively?) contribute an additional dimension that enhances his drawings. (For example, examine the colors of *Hit Comics* #4 and #5 or *Wonderworld* #10 or #11).

Fine drew an number of early features for *Jumbo Comics* as part of the Iger-Eisner shop. He continued his association with this shop as it produced comics for Fox and Quality Publications. For these companies he drew many of the early adventures of 'The Flame' in Wonderworld Comics, 'Dollman' in Feature Comics, 'The Black Condor' in Crack Comics and 'The Ray' for Smash Comics. Much of his magnificent artwork for these features remains 'hidden' due to the rarity of these books. However, it is his covers that have secured Fine's stature as one of the preeminent craftsman of the Golden Age. Several of his covers are thought to have been created in conjunction with layouts by William Eisner. (For example, the Fiction House covers and , perhaps,

"I had respect for his towering kind of draftsmanship. He was the eptiome of the honest draftsman... His consummate skill may never be equalled." –Will Eisner

CHECKLIST

LOU FINE Hall of Fame

June 1939
Wonder #2 (Fox)
Jumbo #8 (Fiction House)

July 1939
Wonderworld #3 (Fox)

August 1939
Wonderworld #4 (Fox)
Jumbo #9 (Fiction House)
Mystery Men #1 (Fox)

September 1939
Wonderworld #5 (Fox)
Mystery Men #2 (Fox)

October 1939
Wonderworld #6 (Fox)
Jumbo #10 (Fiction House)
Mystery Men #3 (Fox)

November 1939
Wonderworld #7 (Fox)
Mystery Men #4 (Fox)

December 1939
Wonderworld #8 (Fox)
Jumbo #11 (Fiction Hse.)
Mystery Men #5 (Fox)
Blue Beetle #1 (Fox)
Fantastic #1

January 1940
Wonderworld #9 (Fox)
Mystery Men #6 (Fox)
Fantastic #2 (Fox)
Planet #1 (Fiction House)
Jungle #1 (Fiction House)
Fight #1? (Fiction House)

February 1940
Wonderworld #10 (Fox)
Fantastic #3 (Fox)
Planet #2 (Fiction House)
Science #1 (Fox)

March 1940
Wonderworld #11 (Fox)
Mystery Men #8 (Fox)
Fantastic #4 (Fox)
Science #2 (Fox)

April 1940
Wonderworld #12 (Fox)
Mystery Men #9 (Fox)
Fantastic #5 (Fox)
Fight #4 (Fiction House)
Science #3 (Fox)
Weird #1 (Fox)

May 1940
No Lou Fine Covers

continued ▶

early National Comics covers.) Some later National Comics covers may have been a collaboration with Reed Crandell.

Note his work for Fox Publications abruptly ends with books cover dated April 1940. Accordingly, *Weird Comics* #2 (probably a Joe Simon cover), *Green Mask* #1 (Summer 1940) and *Samson* #1 (Fall 1940), which are ascribed to Fine may have to be reassessed. There is a two month hiatus of covers as Fine made the switch to Quality Publications.

I have quipped that I am Lou Fine's #1 fan. However, after speaking with Gil Kane, Murphy Anderson, and others, I have learned that I will just have to stand in line. ■

"Lou Fine was a big inspiration to me. He brought a touch of class to the field. Lou was a tremendous artist who was very dedicated. Lou was one of the first artists to really take the time to do a good job."
–Murphy Anderson

"My favorite artist was Lou Fine. He was also Jack Kirby's favorite artist. I know that Jack was a fan of and greatly influenced by Fine's work."
–Joe Simon

"I went crazy over Lou's stuff... What most don't realize is that all the rest of the comic publishing community were literally slaves waiting for each new issue of anything Fine would do... as an instructional course in how to do comics." **–Gil Kane**

June 1940
no Lou Fine Covers

July 1940
Hit #1 (Quality)
National #1 (Quality)

August 1940
Hit #2 (Quality)
National #2 (Quality)

September 1940
Hit #3 (Quality)
National #3 (Quality)

October 1940
Hit #4 (Quality)
National #4 (Quality)

November 1940
Hit #5 (Quality)
National #5 (Quality)

December 1940
Hit #6 (Quality)
National #6 (Quality)

January 1941
Hit #7 (Quality)
National #7 (Quality)

February 1941
Hit #8 (Quality)
National #8 (Quality)

March 1941
Hit #9 (Quality)
National #9 (Quality)

April 1941
Hit #10 (Quality)
National #10 (Quality)

May 1941
Hit #11 (Quality)
National #11 (Quality)

June 1941
Hit #12 (Quality)
National #12 (Quality)

July 1941
Hit #13 (Quality)
National #13 (Quality)
Uncle Sam #1 (Quality)

August 1941
Hit #14 (Quality)
National #14 (Quality)

September 1941
Hit #15 (Quality)
National #15 (Quality)

October 1941
Hit #16 (Quality)
National #16 (Quality)

November 1941
Hit #17 (Quality)
National #17 (Quality)

December 1941
National #18 (Quality)
Uncle Sam #2 (Quality)

NIGHT OF THE PAPER NOIR

WILL EISNER, TEX BLAISDELL, DAVE BERG, JULES FEIFFER, AL JAFFEE, ALEX KOTZKY, JOE SIMON, AND JOE KUBERT... REMEMBER THE WAR YEARS AS THE EIGHT-PERSON JAMBOREE INTERVIEW CONTINUES!

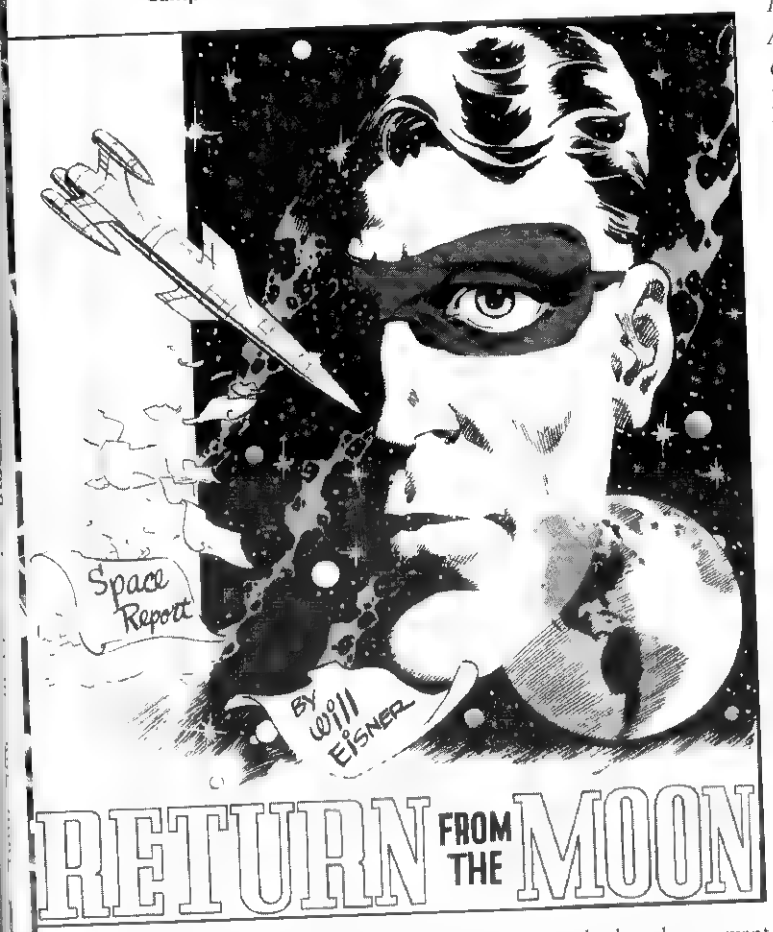
PART II **BY PETER DEPREE**

(CAMERA: Give me a gritty, contrasty B&W film here. Let's get Will to walk slowly through these venetian blind shadows.)

PETER DEPREE: You saw the panel as analogous to a film frame?

WILL EISNER: Not quite the same way. Major influences on me were not only film but live theater. As I grew up through the '30s, I was very interested in theater and stage design. So I saw it as theater, but incorporated film nuance heavily during the early Spirit days and the early comics that I did, largely because I realized that reading was being influenced by film. We tend to be influenced in our comprehension by other media to which we're exposed. MTV today has tremendous impact on the current reading rhythm and acquisition. Lacking the patience for longer, involved works, we want shorter, crisper stories packed with sound-bites. These are the influences. Visual literacy comes from film in modern society."

RETURN FROM THE MOON!
Lunar Noir: The Feiffer/Wood/Eisner 'Dream Team' collaboration on the Spirit outerspace miniseries created an untouchable camp '50s masterpiece.



(Will and Peter walk across a bluescreen backdrop which will later be retouched with a computer-graphic of the old moderne and deco picture palaces.)

"I did turn to film a great deal to employ 'camera techniques.' I was very, very impressed with Fritz Lang in those days, a real fan of his films–*Metropolis* and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* were favorites–and I paid a lot of attention to the new photography and imagery films were producing. I wasn't trying to emulate film, I was *employing* the visual language influenced by film. For example, film was using the camera as the reader's eye. Perhaps you'd be looking through a keyhole watching something happening. I frequently used a scene where the reader was looking through a man's arm as he stood there with arms akimbo. I did one sequence where I had the reader looking through his *own eyes*–a story seen entirely through the eyes of the reader. Experimentation is very much a part of the fun, enjoyment and satisfaction I have in this medium. I'm constantly pushing the envelope.

"I used to pay a lot of attention to the Man Ray surreal, experimental films. And of course I grew up on the Saturday afternoon serials in theaters. These were years when filmmaking was really growing into maturity. The '30s and early '40s were the grey years of our society, all films and most magazine illustrations were in black-&-white. Everything was black-&-white."

CAMERA ON DEPREE: It was a time of noirs like *Dark Passage, Nobody Lives Forever, The Big Sleep, Maltese Falcon, Double Indemnity, Hangover Square, The Big Clock, Criss Cross, Fallen Angel*... Coinciding with this '40's dark cinema, Will's books acquired a campy angst that arched into high art at times. That gritty German Expressionist lighting, those destabilizing camera angles and moody backdrops were techniques the resourceful Will saw ways to incorporate. And something subtler.

EISNER: "What the film noir provided me with was evidence of the kind of rhythm possible in this medium. They all had a rhythm to them that color obfuscates.

"In communication you always take into account the external influences on your reader and you link with them by these references. Some of the Spirit stories like *Hurricane* reflect a film influence in the staging, but the experimental movement of panels and frames is something totally removed from film. Remember that in film you're unaware of panels; each frame is the same size and same shape and is flashing by you. In comics, each frame/panel has technically a different size and shape which plays a crucial part and meaning in storytelling. A comic book frame impacts on the story's emotional content–a very sophisticated technique that I examined in depth in *Comics and Sequential Art*. The frame does more than simply separate and contain the flow of action. The shape of a frame has an effect on the emotion you want to evoke: jagged-edged frames evoke one emotion, rigid frames quite another. A long narrow or oblong frame contributes to a feeling of crowdedness, of being imprisoned, or implies great depth. A vertical frame has a different meaning than the frame that's wide and flat."

DEPREE: Steranko once told me that to him a wide, flat frame evokes a sense of calmness and steadiness.

EISNER: Yes, because it relates to the natural function of your own vision. For example, the reason that you–a human animal–widen your eyes when you're in terror, is because you want to see as much as possible–by which you can better negotiate your escape routes. A wide frame removes you from direct involvement with the characters, and gives you a bird's-eye view. So the reader becomes an observer from a distance. I agree with Steranko, there's a calming quality there.

DEPREE: Like this panel in *Hurricane* of Satin and the Spirit looking out over the ocean sunset—the only panel on the page that is long and flat.

EISNER: That's right. There's a reason for it. In the '40s I was still experimenting with these ideas. The wonderful thing about working in comics is that on-the-job training process. So I'm constantly probing. I hadn't fully refined these devices, but I knew why I was doing what I was doing.

ALL ART © WILL EISNER

I did use a lot of motion picture reference in *Hurricane*.

In this medium, you have neither sound or motion. You have to imply motion, availing yourself of whatever visual experience your readers have had relating to motion. This leads one to resort to the visual clichés used in film. Without sound and motion, it becomes a totally different medium.

I wondered about possible influences from Orson Welles' flavor of baroque noir. "I was extremely flattered a couple of months ago at a meeting of the California Cartoonists' Professional Society when one of the men there told me that he knew Orson Welles very well, and said Welles had been reading The Spirit with fond avidity. And I just ballooned into the ceiling because I admired Orson Welles tremendously, thought he was one of the most experimental filmmakers.

"I was very much aware of Welles in 1940. Whether *Citizen Kane*–a very strongly influential film visually–came out before or after I began The Spirit, I can't remember, but I certainly recall being tremendously impressed. Welles used a visual language very, very effectively. Which is what we do in this medium, the visuals being here a form of language. You can safely say that if I wasn't influenced by him, I'd be much surprised! (laughs) The term 'influences' is frequently misused in our business. There's a fine line between imitation and influence–but a big distinction in my mind. Influence is the absorption of concept whereas imitation is mindless copying. We all work on our predecessors' shoulders. It's impossible not to, because the visual impressions and selections you make, what you think is good, are invariably predicated on what you've seen before.

DEPREE: Your short-stories worked as self-contained units that could have stood on their own, without the focalizing lens of Denny Colt in many cases.

EISNER: Exactly. That's a very good point, which harks back to how at the inception I was more interested in doing stories than a serial cartoon character. The difference between writing about somebody like The Spirit or about a superhero, is that once you create a superhero his powers are so all-encompassing you're trapped into limited narrative material. Stories built around his remarkable powers tend to be repetitive as you wind up constantly reapplying the same themes to different situations.

DEPREE: Steranko notes in his *History of Comics 2* that if the Spirit was injured he would wear a bandage or exhibit a bruise–sometimes for several weeks of strips! When he got socked, it hurt, and he suffered accordingly. It made The Spirit more believable than many of the other characters.

EISNER: I'm glad you chose that word because I've always begun my stories with the implied plea, 'Believe me.' I'm a storyteller and in telling stories you start with asking for that. I'm constantly reaching for the reader's recognition of reality.

"The Spirit tale that has always been my favorite was *'The Story' of Gerhard Shnobble* since it represents the first time I allowed myself to go flat out for a "literary" theme. It epitomized the philosophical statement which I regard as the true distinction between the entertainment story and the story that makes comics literature. The comics form historically was identified with pure entertainment. I believe that the turning point in the history of comics as a literary form occurred in the late '60s in San Francisco in the underground comics. Because there, for the first time, comics were employed as a protest medium in which the authors were making social statements.

BY Will EISNER
Once, a long time ago, somebody came along and proclaimed that the world was round! Everybody denied it. Once a long time ago, somebody else came along and proclaimed that other universes outside our own existed! Everybody denied it. Once, not so long ago, somebody came along and said there was life on these universes! It has been officially denied!

SPIRIT IN OUTER SPACE! While the rest of us baby boomers were sneaking out of bed to watch the Outer Limits... Will, Feiffer and Woody were creating this flying saucer masterpiece.

"I worked generally on two-ply Bristol board using a Japanese brush, which takes a great deal of skill and finesse because it lacks resilience and won't snap back the way a sable-hair does. There were two reasons why I found them preferable to work with; the main reason was they were *cheap!* The second reason was that very early on I was interested in Oriental art and woodcuts, recognizing in them the forerunner of comics. Look at the early Japanese woodcuts–the Hiroshige prints are a good example–and you'll be struck by the tremendous similarity between them in the line art and so forth. Although the Japanese brush gives you a truly beautiful line, it takes tremendous control. The only other guy in our shop who could master them–outdo me in fact–was Lou Fine."

KUBERT RECALLS THIS TEMPERAMENTAL TOOL ALL TOO WELL: "I worked with the Japanese brush and used it for quite some time. That again was one of the things I was able to pick up and learn about while working up there next to those guys, but I could never get the hang of working that brush the way Will did. He was just a whiz with it. The Japanese brush, which the Japanese and Chinese use to write the language, has a very fine point, but the hairs are dead. The brushes we use today have the ability to snap back to a point. If I'd lean on it during a stroke it would stay in that position. It was difficult to get accustomed to, but it was a beautiful tool when the other guys used it."

I asked Will if he used the brushes solely for large black wash areas.

"No, you used them all the way. I used the pen only for backgrounds–chairs, tables, doorways, picture frames and stuff of that sort

THE SPIRIT 'FEAR' COVER Was a precursor of the 'shock' genre popular with adult fans.

As a matter of fact, the fluidity of that brush. .the open mouths with the saliva lines so popular in modern comics comes from Lou Fine who employed the Japanese brush that way. It was stumbled upon because the Japanese brush didn't hold ink quite the way sable brushes do. You made the black areas by stroking it in but not all the way, so the ink spread a little differently. Just like the odd-shaped panel; each of these techniques resulted from experimentation."

Kotzky, who today employs a civilized Winsor-Newton #3 on *Apartment 3G*, remembers: "As a matter of fact I used the Japanese brush some of the time too, as did Lou Fine. Today I have some old ones laying around and can't imagine how we used it because there isn't any resiliency in the body of the brush!"

(The following interview scene is shot on a fake beach set. Feiffer, Eisner, and DePree sweat under the halogens. In the background among a cluster of plastic department-store palms, stand silhouettes of the famous Spirit fatales.)

A JAPANESE BRUSH, some Mozart, and a thousand pressing deadlines were Will's late-night companions at the drawing board. Tex, Chop, Kubert, Mazoujian, Berg, and Kotzky had long since taken the subway home when Will finally hit the studio cot.

DEPREE: Will, you share with Chester Gould the technique of using flamboyant character names.

EISNER: Gould preceded me Again, it has to do with influences. I always believed that names somehow take on the characteristics of the personality themselves And I always felt the way Gould did, that to relate the names to the nature of a character was very important to the creation of the character themself, like Skinny Bones, or Silk Satin. P'Gell was taken from Place Pigalle, a WWII Paris street packed with prostitutes! The GI's always knew about Place Pigalle and I thought–'Oh great–let's call her P'Gell!' I was especially interested in her because she was so amoral. (Laughter.) Skinny Bones was based on a girl I knew. Silk Satin I liked too, the highly romantic gal. I was always intrigued–not only professionally but personally!–by women who had a competence and identity all their own I never really thought much of Ellen–the girl next door. In romance adventures the winning of the "good" girl is dull. But to seduce someone like Silk Satin, or P'Gell is an accomplishment! That's something. That's worth the game "

THESE EISNER FEMME FATALES WERE SPELLBINDING TO FEIFFER: "The Spirit's relationship with women I found fascinating. Will wrote some very strong woman characters. Even Ellen Dolan, the girlfriend, was powerful in her own right, very opinionated and strong, which always intrigued me

"I thought Satin–who became Sand Saref later on–was the most interesting, because she was kind of a cross between Caniff's Burma and the *Dragon Lady*. She was my favorite. P'Gell I never cared for. But I think Will liked her the best."

KOTZKY MAKES A GOOD POINT: "Although the police inspector, Commissioner Dolan, was my favorite, they were *all* good. They all harmonized together, which made it a great feature."

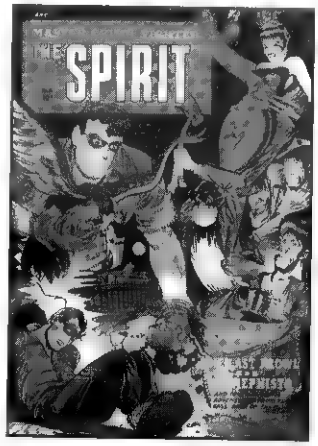
EISNER CONTINUES: "All my characters are generally based on people I've known or a combination of them. Even the characters I do today are drawn from a combination of several people I've known.

"I start my story with a thumbnail. In the Spirit days, instead of a thumbnail rough, I would work right on the board itself. Generally I would plot by making a laundry list of the script (something I still do to this day), usually starting with the *end* of the story. Knowing what the story's going to end with, the rest of it becomes a problem-solving exercise in which I lead up to that conclusion. So, unlike a lot of writing that I've seen in the years I've been in the business, I don't start off with a doorknob and build a whole house around it–I start off with the concept of the house and begin tightening the details. I would rough out the Spirit story on the page, and I always had seven pages so knew precisely how much space I had to tell that story–and then I would write it down on a sheet of paper and make a numbered list so on each page I knew what I wanted to cover. "It works for me. I know a lot of writers who start off with a catchy opening line and then just keep writing until the end. When I work on my graphic novels now, I start with the end in mind but can develop the story until I finish, which may take a hundred pages or more. Lacking that luxury on the weekly seven-page Spirit, I had to preplan each page meticulously beforehand -like taking a bologna and slicing it!"

DEPREE: Might that have inadvertently improved these stories by forcing you to approach them as an organic whole and work within a limited space?

EISNER: Any discipline or pressure tends to improve what you're doing. I'm a firm believer in deadlines–deadlines tend to force the best out of you. If you have too much time, you tend to get sloppy and do shoddy work. I rarely had patience with the complaint–'Well, I didn't have time to do this.' The best solutions to problems come to you quickly. And in the reasoning process of creating that solution is when you develop wonderful things.

"I never wrote with a standard script, never used a typewriter in all the years I've been working. I write the balloons and do the images almost simultaneously. I believe that the image comes first and the text comes afterwards



"I would dramatize the action and then hear the text. Text in my stories always–even on The Spirit–is a result of the action. The classic procedure is to first write a script. The artist will then take that script and append to it the images that it calls for. I do the reverse: my images evoke the script. I discuss that idea in the new book I'm writing, *Graphic Storytelling*, a textbook followup to *Comics and Sequential Art*

"Even to this day, although some of my graphic novels have been done in wash or color, most of my work centers around black-&-white line, which I prefer. Originally the book *Signal From Space* (since retitled *Life On Another Planet*) was color, but now is being reprinted by Kitchen Sink in black-&-white. It looks a heck of a lot better, is far more readable, and will be even more successful without color."

KOTZKY RECALLS EISNER'S DEVOTION TO THE WORK: "Will was certainly a hard worker. He would come in on Sunday mornings and work till the night and then he'd have the stuff ready for us to start working on Monday morning. His penciling was semi-rough. He laid in the backgrounds, how he wanted them, and then Tex and I started repenciling the backgrounds and inking. And there usually was quite a bit of background. You would think there wasn't enough to keep us both busy, but there was."

Certainly, what the artists recall as a series of compassionate scenes were punctuated now and again with misunderstanding. Tex recalls how his job in the Eisner/Quality stable mysteriously ended: "Alex Kotzky came in towards the end of my Tudor City tenure, at the end of '41. An unfortunate happenstance occurred which I was unaware of at the time. I noticed that I was sitting there idly, and the work that I had been doing, mostly on The Spirit, I noticed that Al was taking over at his drawing board in the kitchen. So I sat there for almost a month not hardly doing anything! Finally, I confronted Bill–'Listen, I don't feel right about taking my pay because I'm not doing anything!' He instantly brightened up and said 'Well, I certainly appreciate your attitude and well...alright.' And so we terminated the association at that point."

What had happened emerged much later: "Bob Powell, it turned out, had approached Bill saying he wanted more money. Bill tried to explain to him that he couldn't give him more money because the product wasn't selling appropriately, and of course cost of living went up but his income didn't. Bob had a short fuse (which of course Bill was aware of) but they laid off of that subject. Bob was moved to tell him that Bill's fair-haired boy (me) had referred to Bill with an antisemitic slur. Which, of course, I had not.That was why his attitude towards me had cooled and why he hired Al Kotzky to replace me without even saying anything to me. Bill was a gentle soul and he invited me to lunch along the way there, and now I realize that what he wanted to do was discuss the situation, but couldn't bring himself to do it. So we just parted with that dark cloud hanging between us and–I didn't even know what it was!

"So I went out freelancing and made a helluva lot more money. Bill was affiliated with Busy Arnold, and Busy didn't think it was a smart idea for Bill to let me escape after spending a year there learning their secrets of production and storytelling. He said 'Send him over here and we'll keep him in the stable.' Busy gave me work at $15 a page, the top rate in the field at the time! But those pages were twelve panels and one was required to write them and draw them and ink them and letter them for that fifteen bucks, which worked out to a little over a dollar per panel. Oh boy! But it was more money than I had ever been paid before. Meanwhile I was doing work for Lloyd Jacquet, a lovely man, at nine dollars per page, writing and drawing comedy material which is my normal bent. He packaged comics for publishing companies like Curtis, *Saturday Evening Post*, and they had this line of comics they were financing, but of course the minute they were able to not bother with it they dropped it, same as Sidney Hillman did when he got *Pageant* magazine selling. Although these guys were ashamed to be affiliated with comics, comics paid their rent! As soon as they could afford to get it somewhere else, they quit. Lloyd had several publishers he produced finished books for, and I was doing an imitation *Lil Abner* type of thing for him. But it didn't have twelve panels, on a page, only five or six. And it was fun stuff to do so I kept on doing it for nine dollars a page.

WOOD ORCHESTRATED B&W tapestries of graphic splender done for Will rivaled Wally's legendary Ray Bradbury shorts illustrated for EC.

You listen for sounds. There are none. You breathe loudly just to hear something, even your own breathing..
MOVE AROUND CAREFULLY, NOW. TRY A FEW LEAPS IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND HOW MUCH LESS GRAVITY THERE IS HERE THAN ON EARTH!

Combine that with the Busy Arnold work and by the time they came and drafted me, I was making $175 a week! $175 a week in 1942 was a fortune! I never made that much money again until I did *Little Orphan Annie* in '68. Of course once I was succeeding they came and drafted me in 1942 and dragged me off kicking and screaming."

EISNER GAG CARTOON
Obviously influenced by EC-great Jack Davis.

Dave Berg too was just hitting his stride when WWII tripped him up: "The other job Will gave me was *The Death Patrol* after the guy who did that feature went on to other things I did *Death Patrol* for almost a year. That was completely mine, took over completely–art, scripts, you name it That too was an instant success and I immediately started getting fanmail. (Which, incidentally, I never actually received because the main office was in Connecticut and we were in Tudor City!) *Death Patrol* was very popular and kept going for years because after I went off to the Army other people took it over *Death Patrol* made me famous. The man who was doing it ahead of me has since passed away. Of course he then became famous with *Playboy*.

"It started with a group of prisoners who were released so they could fight the Nazis. In each story one of them would get killed and another would replace him Then Busy Arnold whined–'You get these swell characters and you kill em off! I don't *like* that!' So he insisted I had to bring them back. And I had to write a special story how they all came back!

"But then it was off to the war. I spent a few months with *Captain Marvel* and then went into the Air Force."

Scene III: Pearl Harbor

"Then we all go off to war, okay? Then we come back." –Dave Berg

The first hint of the disintegration of the Tudor City studio came through the mesh of Will's tortoiseshell and red-mahogany radio: "The music I listened to was mostly classical, I've always been a classic fan," Eisner recalls "As a matter of fact, on the Sunday Pearl Harbor was surprise-attacked, I was in the studio.

The New York Philharmonic Carnegie Hall concert was on and I remember it being interrupted with the announcement that Pearl Harbor was bombed. And I knew that my number would be up very shortly because I was draftable."

Tex recalls the Japanese sneak-attack this way. "I was home in my married apartment six months after my wedding, reading the Sunday comics when we heard it over the radio that morning. I didn't know where the hell Pearl Harbor was anymore than anybody else did. My father, the ex-marine did, and explained to me what that was all about, that the news reports were crap, that what they had done was sink the entire Pacific fleet–which they did not tell the public."

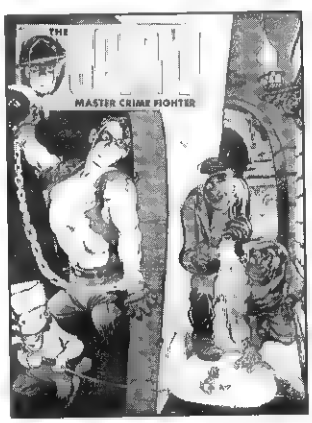
"I was in my father's apartment in the Bronx," Al Jaffee recalls, "when I heard the newsboy shouting over and over downstairs- 'Pearl Harbor Bombed!' I was twenty."

"My draft board gave me an extra six months," Eisner says, "because I needed to get someone to replace me, giving me a chance to organize the Spirit's continuation. After the six month deferment, I went into the Army in '42. So I had a year and a half working on the prewar Spirit." The War was everywhere, Irving Berlin's *This Is The Army* was just opening on Broadway when Will was inducted.

En masse, there was a mad rush to get all the comic characters covered. Dave Berg remembers the chaos: "Lou Fine was upstairs. The war started and we were all leaving to go into the Army. So Fine, who was lame, was going to take over and I was assigned to write the first Spirit for him. And I did, but that particular one didn't get published because he didn't get the characters right. He was an excellent artist but it was a new character he was unfamiliar with. It wasn't until the second script that he got it. So the first one was junked, unfortunately So Lou continued the Spirit while Eisner was in Ordnance."

(EDITING: Left behind, lame Lou Fine's light burning late into the night–the Secret Master tucked away in the garret apartment Will rented exclusively for him, would ghost The Spirit through the War Years.)

"I was with Eisner at the most six months because then the war started and the whole thing broke up." But for so short a time, in this artificial world of mass-production, Berg was missing Eisner already: "I got my notice and they said I would be going in a certain amount of months, so I took an easy job at Fawcett doing *Captain Marvel* for a few months."



Things seemed good Well, not horrible anyway. The persona. aspects were gone: "They had a mass-production idea because they knew they were going to lose everybody, so they crammed in as much work as possible The whole three years I was gone, my work kept coming out! I told the GIs in the barracks or tents–'I did that,' and they wouldn't believe me! 'But you're in the Army for three years–how could you have done it?' It looked as if my career was uninterrupted.

"Eisner did posters and pamphlets for Ordnance and I did them for chemical warfare. Only I went overseas Iwo Jima. I was in that mess."

Scene IV: "Best friends."

Too young to go slug it out with the Japanazis, Kubert got another big break "I worked with Lou Fine during one of my high school summer stints–just about the time war broke out, '41, '42. Will had gone into the Army and Lou had taken over the strip. And by that time I was kinda improving my work a little bit, enough anyhow to be able to do inking

on The Spirit, and one of the jobs involved my commuting up to the Stamford, Connecticut satellite office Busy Arnold ran, where Lou and Alex Kotzky were working. The Spirit was being done there, and Lou was the guy who did all the penciling, Alex was one of the inkers, and I was the other one. Here I was inking on The Spirit (laughs) only a few years after I started out sweeping up the joint!"

His astonishment is reasonable–if the erasing had been monkey work, Kubert was now handling the true finesse stage of the process, usually allocated only to the established pros.

I HIT A NERVE WHEN I ASK KOTZKY IF HE REMEMBERS LOU FINE: "How could I forget *Lou Fine!*? Around January of '42, Will hired Lou to do The Spirit because Eisner got called for the Army. And they moved the place up to Stamford, Connecticut, Busy Arnold's offices.

"My family lived in NYC but I would go up there and work Monday through Friday and then come home by train, returning Monday morning. I stayed in a family home which rented rooms. I inked The Spirit while Lou penciled. We worked together in the same room for a little over a year until I was called into the service. I admired Lou very much. Then Joe Kubert came up to Connecticut with his father around Spring of '42. Although the artists didn't last long enough to form deep friendships in Tudor City (they were constantly being drafted) when we got to Stamford we had a tight group up there: Gill Fox, Jack Cole, Lou Fine, myself, and Aldon McWilliams. Aldon was very good on destroyers, battleships and nautical things. He went into the service and became a master sergeant."

Kotzky hands me a B&W photo with crinkle-cut edges someone snapped back in the '40s with a Kodak Baby Brownie. It shows him working next to Lou in Stamford.

"I didn't do anything except backgrounds at Tudor studio, but once I went up to Connecticut I freelanced evenings on other comic books like *Manhunter*–on top of the eight hour days with Lou on The Spirit. (I get photostats from readers who remind me of what I had done back then, some of which I don't remember at all!)

"Quality editor Gill Fox was up there and we became good friends and still keep in touch. He was in the same office but then he felt the hot breath of the draft and went to work on a farm hoping to get deferred. But it didn't work out, he went in a month before I did

"Another guy who sometimes came in and worked in the Stamford office and who lived in Stamford was Jack Cole, *Plastic Man* Swell cartoonist."

JAFFEE AGREES: "Cole, who committed suicide, was gifted, one of the top imaginative cartoonists I admired his work enormously. *Plastic Man* was brilliant, the concept was so exciting, the imagination just fabulous–almost like animation is today where a figure squeezes through a keyhole."

"In Spring of '43, six months before I went into the service, Kotzky continues, they moved Lou Fine and I back to the Lexington Avenue Quality office. They started me doing covers for all the books, because they just didn't have any other artists available, they were all in the service at that time. So for the six months before I went into the service, all I did was covers, five a week! *Plastic Man* and *Blackhawk* and all those features, doing the whole thing myself. I eventually went overseas with the Fourth Infantry Division. I was in England for about a day, then Belgium, Luxembourg, France and Germany

"Lou was very warm and friendly and a great friend to me," Kotzky grins sadly, "We would get together often and go bowling up there. Even though Lou had a bum leg and his wife had a very serious heart condition, they would come out with us and even if they didn't bowl they would sit around just to be with us. But since I was so young in comparison to the others, (Cole, Lou, and Fox were all 25, 26–seven years older than me) when they did socialize and ask the wives over, I was too young to be invited! But Lou would have me over for dinner by myself and he was a great friend

"Stamford was a wonderful city. Just like a small town. In fact we worked across the street from the town hall. There was a little triangle outside, sort of a lush lawn with red picnic tables shaded by ancient oaks. I vividly recall many lunchtime picnics there with Gill Fox, Lou and his wife,

LIKE SOME GORGEOUS ebony wave, black noir was dominating and enriching Will's artwork by 1948.

Aldon, Jack Cole and the whole bunch ..So, quite a group."

And I remember at Christmas time that was the first year that *I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas* came out, and they played that constantly, all day long on the bells. '42. What an idyllic year for me."

Scene V: Tailors' Sons

Meanwhile, with Eisner and Jaffee at the Pentagon, Tex scrunched up in a B-29, and Kubert, Kotzky, and Fine holding down the four-color fort, Davey Berg found himself in a different world entirely: "They sent me to a very special school at Edgewood Arsenal for chem-warfare. As a sergeant, I was thoroughly trained with the officers. And then after having learned everything, I came back and could write pamphlets and so on. And then, towards the end of '45 my Colonel said—'Well, training's over. Let's fight the war.' And I shipped overseas.

"We were Air Force, a P-47 outfit, and ran the airfields. I was the sergeant in charge of things. Our pilots would take off every day and protect the B-29s which was our main job. Although when the war ended our commanding officer let on that we were only marking time because our real job was the invasion of Japan... You would not be talking to me, I would be very dead, cause they were fanatics. The Marines had to kill just about every one of the 21,000 Japanese packed onto the tiny island of Iwo Jima. The only POWs we had were captured wounded. Nobody surrendered. We lost 6000 killed and a lot of wounded. I wasn't a Marine so wasn't in such danger as they were, but there was still plenty of sniper fire and aerial bombing. But I felt I did my job. We took the island for the airstrip.

"Towards the end of the war I did have another very interesting assignment. After Iwo Jima was taken, it was pretty safe and becoming civilized and they formed a volunteer newspaper. They began to use me as a war correspondent and I was sent to different places."

I push through the heavy scarlet drapery and find Tex Blaisdell on the studio balcony. I offer him one of the cigars Joe Simon keeps handing out and light it. Through the pungent smoke he drifts back: "Dick French I socialized with because he happened to be my brother in law, I married his sister Elaine. While I was out gallivanting, winning the war singlehandedly, she was a chorus girl, a showgirl in a succession of shows, primarily USO. She worked at the Roxy theater as one of the Roxyettes, imitation Rockettes. And at Radio City. She was also in Clifford Fisher's *Folie Bergeres* for a while until it folded."

Since his May, '42 induction, Eisner had been doing a variety of features, including *Joe Dope*, at the Pentagon. Jaffee recalls running into him there: "Our war careers crossed. I was brought up to the Pentagon and bumped into Will in one of the coffeeshops and we got to reminiscing together. He was a warrant officer and I was a Sergeant. I had washed out of pilot training and had to be reassigned and the only Air Force MOS they could come up with was that I was sort of a draftsman/artist. They shipped me around in various places doing that kind of thing and then a Dr. Howard Rusk started a convalescent rehab program and needed people to prepare pamphlets and make illustrations of returning problems of soldiers and equipment and therapy so I got the call and was shipped up to the Pentagon. I was there for a couple of years working in the Air Surgeons office assigned to Colonel Rusk who later went on to become very famous creating the Rusk Institute for disabled people and I made posters and did all kind of things there for a couple years."

"While I was doing comic strips at Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington D.C. during the war," Joe Simon fills in, "Will was in the Army doing this comic type of instruction thing, P*S (*Preventive Maintenance Monthly*) which he did for years.

"I lived in the former Egyptian Embassy in DC, which they had converted into a rooming house. I was doing *True Comics*, a weekly Sunday strip syndicated throughout the country, and the deal was that the Coast Guard would allow

NEW YORK!
ROOKY, EH?? SORRY, POP.. CAN'T USE HIM!
BUT...
ER.. 'M NOT LOOKING FOR NEW TALENT THIS YEAR.. HRUMPH!! SORRY...
NOPE. SORRY, POP!
MISS LASH? POP FLYE WAS HERE PEDDLING HIS PITCHER.... NATURALLY I TURNED HIM DOWN AS YOU. ER.. SUGGESTED. .NOW ABOUT THAT LOAN YOU PROMISED US....
?? WHAT A BRUSHOFF! BUT WHY??
WELL! POP FLYE! I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU SINCE THE '34 CARD-TIGER SERIES! HEAR YOU GOT A NEW PITCHER!
Y'HEARD RIGHT! ARKY! BUT IT 'PEARS HIM AN' ME IS BOTH OUT N THE COLD!
BOOTS SHORE
YOU GUYS MUST REMEMBER "BAFFLER" FLYE...TH' FOG BALL ARTIST O' TH' 1908 VIOLETS! HE'S GOT A GREAT NEW PITCHER....
SO I HOID! SO I HOID! TOO BAD YOU'LL NEVER SELL 'IM!
GENTS! I WANT Y'SHOULD MEET THE ONE AND ONLY POP FLYE!
WHO??
POP FLYE!
OH!
THE WAY LANA LASH IS FIXIN' THE SQUEEZE, YOU'LL HAFTA BUY A TEAM TO GET YOUR BOY A TRYOUT! HA! HA! IT'S SAID TH' FLATSWAMP BADGERS ARE UP FOR SALE!
LANA LASH! I SHOULDA KNOWED!!
THE BADGERS.. HUMPH! THEM? WHY THAT DUNGEON TEAM FINISHED EIGHTY-FI' GAMES OUT LAST YEAR!!
TUT! TUT! JES' BAD MANAGEMENT! NOW IF YOU WORKED THEM RIGHT, POP, Y MIGHT...Y'MIGHT BUILD A CLUB! CHUCKLE
GOLLY.. YEAH... IT'S WORTH THE CHANCE!! O.K.... WHO OWNS THAT TEAM??
ME!!
I HAD TO HOCK THE TROPHY OL' TY COBB GIMME TO MAKE THE PRICE, BUT IT WAS WORTH IT..... NOW RUBE CAN PITCH WITH A TEAM!!
HAW! WAIT'LL HE SEES WHAT HE BOUGHT!!

BLEND A BAKER'S DOZEN OF CHIAROSCURO effects, Will's knockabout stage-settings, 'character' faces, gritty humor... and you get the human drama crowding an Eisner-orchestrated splash entitled "New York!".

me to do the strip so long as every third episode was a Coast Guard episode. (The whole thing is a comedy, isn't it!) I was also doing things for DC Comics while in the Coast Guard, and did a whole full-size comic book put out by Street & Smith–*Adventure's My Career*–to draw recruits into the Coast Guard Academy. Street & Smith liked it so much they sold the thing on the newsstands, so we had a million circulation there.

"Will, myself, and Alfred Harvey were all in the public information division. Alfred was a lieutenant in the Pentagon, publishing comic books for the Army. The three of us would go out for drinks occasionally, and Busy Arnold used to come in and take us around the Washington D.C. pubs. But we couldn't keep up bar-hopping with Busy... nevertheless, we did the best we could.

"Will was a very nice looking young warrant officer, personable, well-built, looked sharp in a uniform." Then Simon recalls something which makes him laugh furiously: "Of the three of us, our fathers were all tailors! And so was Jack Kirby's father!"

"In 1946 I returned," Eisner recalls, "opened a Wall Street studio, then moved uptown to larger offices where I conducted a publishing company."

One of the first orders of business for American Visuals' young CEO was to patch over a festering misunderstanding. "So comes now after the war," Tex recalls with a deep sigh, "there was a telephone message left by Will, my wife told me." It was with a mix of curiosity and trepidation that Tex scooped up the Bakelite butterdish phone: "So I called him, and he explained to me that he had finally discovered that I had never said any such thing so that Bill wanted me to come in with him again at his new studio down on Wall Street. Right after the war, late 1946. He got home two weeks before I did, and it was around Christmas time, and he wanted me to come in there and he was gonna give me a piece of the action and we would set up shop and go. And I said four years I've been taking orders. I wanna stand on my own two 'feets' and be a freelancer. Which is exactly what I did. I didn't take Bill's offer. Which in retrospect I should have. Hindsight is 20/20. And I did all right anyway, but I should have. I would've been better off had I gone back with Bill. But he did say that he had discovered that Bob Powell was the troublemaker and he apologized for...whatever, and all that stuff."

The pages Tex eventually freelanced for American Visuals in '46 took Will by surprise. "Bill and I did *Baseball Comics*," Tex recalls, "I drew it and he put faces on the main characters. When I showed him the first page or two of pencils he gushed: 'Jesus Christ, I didn't know you could do this stuff!' The whole time I was working there he didn't realize I could do that kind of work!'" (To get a rough measure of Tex's artistic range, one should bear in mind that later in the syndicates he would work on, for example, *Popeye and Prince Valiant*– simultaneously.)

I find Davey Berg at the rooftop studio bar working on a bone-dry martini: "I get back from the war," he recalls, "and there's a message for me from Will. Will was dropping The Spirit and venturing into another business. And I mean *business*. He was a businessman! And so he brought Jules Feiffer and me over and I would write the stories then rough-in pencil layouts for him, and Will would finish it. He didn't need much penciling. At *MAD* now I do very tight penciling because they have to check it over, but with Eisner you just gave him stick figures, very rough. And he drew with his brush. Yet another remarkable thing about him."

BUT EISNER REFLECTS ON THE BRUTAL TEMPO OF THE NEW SCHEDULE: "When I got out of the Army in '46, John Spranger worked for me doing pencils from my roughs. He would do tight pencils and I would ink over them. It worked back and forth–I did whatever I could to deliver under a production schedule that was very tough, and which just got tougher and tougher as I began doing other things. But occasionally I would get all excited and do the whole thing."

BERG MARVELS AS HE RECALLS THAT ENERGY: "Will opened up the new business doing creations in a variety of fields, for a slew of different accounts. He would buy up businesses and run them, but also handled PR for other companies. And I did some freelance work for him on that. I did a lot of safety things which the government was buying and distributing. He got a lot of good accounts. If you want to know the one big thing about him, here he is this fantastic talent as an artist and a writer but he's also a fantastic businessman! I never heard of anything like that! And he was brilliant at it!"

Scene VI: Wall St. Whiz Kid?

"I was a groupie," –Jules Feiffer

One of Will's more valuable postwar acquisitions was a young kid, nobody's idea of a star draftsman or another Lou Fine, but smart: "I was about 17 years old in '46," Jules Feiffer recalls, "and was looking for work. Although I hadn't worked in comics I was a big Spirit fan. I had some samples, a comic book feature I was working on–*Adam's Atom*–with another fellow who wrote it while I drew it. It was done in a kind of serial comic style–rather badly–and that's what I showed Eisner. I looked him up in the phone book, and he was then on Wall Street in Lower Manhattan (I still remember it–37 Wall Street) and went quite nervously in, and he's sitting in the outer office." Eisner had duplicated the insulating floor plan of Tudor City: "The odd arrangement was that Will sat where the receptionist ordinarily would, in the outer office where he had his drawing table, a rather dark, windowless room, and inside, a larger room than where Will lived, were his staff: letterer Sam Rosen; John Spranger who did some penciling and some inking (he had a wonderful pencil technique, drawing large, clanky, blocky characters. He was terrific at drawing fights. I don't know whatever happened to him.) Dave Berg, and I forget who else was around at the time. Later on he hired Jerry Grandenetti.

"Will thought my samples were terrible, thought I had no talent at all. But I was such an enthusiastic Spirit fan and knew so much about Eisner's career he couldn't help but hire me. So I mainly got hired because I was a groupie. The salary was non-existent, absolutely no pay at all for the first few months, then he laid off everybody for the summer. I forget what the circumstance was. After the summer he hired me back for $25 a week–my first cartoonist's salary–to erase pages and black in areas and do a few backgrounds (which I was miserable at) and stuff like that."

WITH HIS VAST ACCOUNTS, WILL WAS ALWAYS ON THE

LOOKOUT FOR PROMISING TALENT: "Jerry Grandenetti was working as a renderer in an architectural firm in 1947 and came to my shop when I was looking for an assistant to do backgrounds on The Spirit. I decided that a guy who could do architectural rendering would make a superb background man. After working in my shop for a while, he began experimenting with figure drawing, gradually developing proficiency at it. His very strong, controlled brush style impressed me. I don't think he had any comic book ambitions until he worked in my shop for a while–there he established himself as a cartoonist. Up until then I don't know whether he had done figure rendering at all, but he began to learn his craft by inking my work. I would pencil and he would ink the bodies."

FEIFFER RECALLS THE RENDERER-TURNED-COMIC-ARTIST FONDLY: "Jerry Grandenetti and I became good friends when he came to work for Eisner. He couldn't draw at all in the beginning. He had studied architecture and draftsmanship and couldn't draw the human figure very well. But through sheer perseverance and will, he taught himself and succeeded brilliantly, doing some beautiful work, and his backgrounds were quite wonderful too."

EISNER: "Some could ink in the style I wanted and some couldn't. I don't remember who my favorite inkers were but Grandenetti was especially proficient, I always trusted him."

"The only thing done out of that shop was Will's material," Feiffer continues, "the other Spirit Section features were done by artists in their own studios. And then later on, '47 or '48, Eisner started putting out magazines like *The Keupies* and *Baseball Comics* that I was involved with."

I ask Will if he wrote *Hurricane*, one of my favorite Spirit episodes, which leads him to consider the merging of his storytelling with Feiffer's: "Jules was beginning to write Spirit stories for me. He first came to my shop as a studio assistant, then began to write balloons, progressing later to scripting full stories. But (laughing) one of the interesting things is that we've lost track of which stories each of us wrote. So we don't always agree. But he remains a very good friend and we stay in close touch. This is understandable because we were very closely involved, and frequently I would tell him the basic story idea, and he would go ahead and script it. We reached a point where we were so attuned we could integrate our writing. So, in the case of *Hurricane*, I'm pretty sure I wrote that story...but only 'pretty sure'."

FEIFFER REMEMBERS: "We both would come up with stories Some would be my idea, some his. This came about because after working at this job for a while I used to complain to him that I didn't think The Spirit stories were nearly as good as during the pre-war years. I thought he was a better writer and the stories from '39 and '40 were better told and more interesting. (Amazing the stuff I was able to say to him and not get fired–apparently I had a lot of nerve!)

"One time he got so angry he said–'If you think you can write a better story go ahead and write one.' So I did. And to his credit he thought it was very good, and from that point on I was the house writer (for no increase in pay at all) and just thrilled to get the job. I would lay the stories and dialogue out on scraps of paper and show them to Eisner and we'd go through them and then I'd lay them out on the page and he would change them and rewrite.

"I learned structure from radio dramas of the time, which don't exist anymore, shows like *Suspense*, a half-hour weekly drama that was a strong influence on my writing.

"I didn't do any of the drawing. You have to understand that my technique for doing this sort of work was seriously inadequate. However hard I tried I never developed the kind of brush line necessary to be in the comic book profession. Whatever my ambitions were, I just wasn't able to do that kind of work. I didn't have the line for it, didn't have the mind for it. The writing came much more easily and I could have fun with it, which set me off and running.

"Whether I lived up to my own pretensions, I have no idea. I know Will was impressed, and that I loved doing it, and it also taught me a lot about my craft that I was able to apply in later years in my own work."

DAVE BERG, FOR ONE, RECOGNIZED THE UNUSUALLY INCISIVE BRILLIANCE OF HIS ACERBIC COWORKER: "I remember telling my wife 'Feiffer's a genius if he ever gets a break.' Well, of course it turned out to be true. I somehow thought he would never get that break, but he got it. And he hit some great heights."

LIKE THE PRE-WWII TUDOR CITY BULLPEN, FEIFFER'S STINT WAS INTERRUPTED BY A WAR: "I got drafted out of the job in 1951. But actually through my first months during basic training I was writing *The Spirit In Outer Space*, (*'Mission...The Moon'/'Heat On the Moon'/'Rescue'*, *1952*) for Wally Wood."

ALTHOUGH THE EISNER/FEIFFER/WOOD OUTER SPACE SPIRIT TEAMUP RANKS AS A FAN FAVORITE, FEIFFER FELT IT INTERRUPTED THE STRIP'S CHARACTERISTIC LINE: "I've never understood Wood's work, never was a fan of it. It always seemed to me heavy-handed and wooden. He swiped techniques from Alex Raymond

"Bad girl... Spirit spank..."

and others and heavied them up. I just never thought he was a very good artist. I didn't like that style, preferring Eisner's looseness, fluidity of line and movement."

Eisner's artwork, indeed, was as billowy as a zoot-suit, with snap-seamed holding lines. I asked Feiffer if he thought the Japanese brush contributed to that fluidity. "No, I think it's just his state of mind. He has it to this day if you see his work."

BERG SHEDS LIGHT ON WALLY WOOD'S SUBSEQUENT TRAGEDY: "Woody was a sad story. He had a lot of troubles he suffered from, severe headaches. He started to fall behind in his work, and for one year I ghosted his comics at *MAD*. I've kept that secret for a long time. But then while we were on a *MAD* trip to the Virgin Islands he told everybody off. I said–'Well I'm not gonna help you anymore.' And without my helping him he couldn't do it and so eventually they had to fire him. And people were saying I got him fired. Yes I did, but not for the reasons they think! It's because I refused to help him anymore. They think I went up to Bill Gaines and said–'Fire the man!' I didn't do that.

"But still you could never forget the Nazi things he said they were so terrible.

Nobody at *MAD* knew it until he died. Then I said–'Okay, now I can tell you. I ghosted his work.' Though I penciled it, he did the finishing, and that's why they couldn't tell. It was still his style. Everybody used to tease his wife for coming up to the *MAD* office with him...But she was coming up there to keep him from drinking! And then little by little I began to find out the whole story. She's still active last I heard, a colorist in the comic book business. Tatjana."

FEIFFER CONTINUES: "I was the only writer. Marilyn Mercer, Will's secretary, actually did some script work in the early years, but no one else did any writing after I began working on The Spirit.

"I socialized to some extent. Mercer and I became good friends, and used to see each other and have lunch. She was the first person who introduced me to the writers at *The New York Times*, and she brought me into the world of journalism, media and reportage that I didn't know anything about.

"Jerry Grandenetti and I saw a little of each other and hung out a bit, and he too was from the Bronx. But mostly I saw Abe Kanegson, who became my closest friend in the office and my mentor. Abe did lettering and backgrounds. He lived a few blocks from me in the Bronx and we used to see a lot of each other. He was four or five years older and it was always an older brother/younger brother relationship, never co-equals.

"I wrote *Rube Rooky of the Major Leagues*, and had the back page which Eisner gave me as a reward for my labors. It was my first experiment with my own strip, a single-page gag about a kid which tried to deal with kids' life, more or less realistically, as I knew it in the Bronx. It built up some small following, coming out a year or two before *Peanuts*, and in a somewhat similar mode."

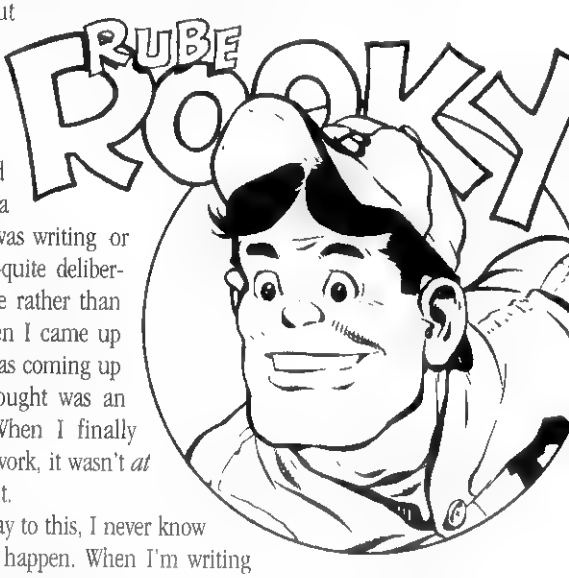
I asked Feiffer if he thought Charles Schultz may have taken something from that as the basis for *Peanuts*.

"It's hard to tell But whether he did or didn't, what he did was carried so much further than I was capable of that it hardly matters."

FEIFFER REMAINS IN AWE OF WILL'S WORK: "First of all, the high intensity, the belief and credibility of the characters–with each other and within themselves–was unparalleled in comic strips except for *Terry and the Pirates*. Caniff and Will were the two best storytellers in comic history. No one told stories better than those two. It was that storytelling which interested me, and what we later learned to call the film noir style of The Spirit: the realistic settings, the use of sounds like dripping faucets, the flying newspapers in the street, which seemed to me such a realistic view of the city that I grew up in: the grittiness of it, the lowclassness of it, the lower depth feeling about it. Look, there's nothing middleclass about The Spirit! But it had for me a rather glamorous feel

"One script I wrote which was very personal to me concerned sound. 'It will take you seven minutes to read this story, and in that seven minutes somebody will die.' I wrote the script in real time. As you read the story from beginning to end it takes that exact amount of time in the life of the characters. It was fun, a challenge. And then there was a story about a man going blind which I wrote and Eisner contributed to (or maybe he wrote and I contributed to–I forget the exact genesis) but that was a lot of fun. The Fables that he wrote at Christmas or at Halloween and the satires, when he opted for humor, were of great interest to me."

I ASK FEIFFER ABOUT THE SAME FAVORITE SPIRIT EPISODE I ASKED WILL ABOUT: "My memory is that I wrote *Hurricane*. But Will's right, it's hard to say because we worked so closely together. And whether I wrote a story or not, I was writing or trying to write–quite deliberately in his style rather than mine. Even when I came up with a story, I was coming up with what I thought was an Eisner script. When I finally began my own work, it wasn't *at all* like The Spirit.



FIREBALL BAMBINO was reworked and became Rube Rookie... a collaboration of Tex, Feiffer and Will after World War II.

"From that day to this, I never know what's going to happen. When I'm writing *now* I don't know what's going to happen until five or fifteen minutes ahead of time. I make notes in my work of what I would *like* to happen, but it often veers away. I relish the spontaneity."

Around the time Feiffer was drafted to Korea, Davey Berg recalls a moment that may or may not have signaled, to paraphrase Hemingway, The End of Something. "I didn't like my position as a Marvel editor because I wasn't creative but judging other people's work. I was very unhappy in that job and didn't want it, didn't ask for it, Stan Lee decided I should be an editor

"The last thing I did with Stan was *Combat Kelly*, about the Korean war. I was able to switch from serious to lighthearted to the real cartoony. Stan and I got to be very close friends and he took me aside one day and said–'We've over-produced, we're going to have to close down for a while. Look to jump elsewhere.' And I immediately went to *MAD* and that was it. But the fact that he only gave *me* the tip. And they did close down for some months.

"I'm the only one from Tudor City who stayed in, who continued, and the rest went off into other fields. Chuck Cudeira became a high-ranking officer. I saw him for the last time when the Korean war started, ran into

him at Grand Central by accident." The half-Italian, half Jewish *Blackhawk* artist looked sallow in the faint subway light. Their voices rose through the cavernous immensity of Grand Central's Concourse. "Chuck says–'Well, uhm, they called me back and I might as well make it my career.'"

"He was very high up, I think he was a Colonel. He gave it all up and became a professional soldier. It's amazing that with all the really top talent they had I think I'm the only one that stayed with it."

"Actually", I tell Berg, accepting another round of martinis from the drifting studio waitress (a Sand Saref lookalike stand-in) "just the reverse may be true. Kubert runs a thriving school for comic artists in Dover. Tex teaches there. Feiffer, of course, is still an incredibly productive (not to mention successful) cartoonist. Kotzky reaches millions with *Apartment 3G*. Your buddy Jaffee *still* draws for *MAD*. Joe Simon is collaborating on a Captain America poster with the Hildebrandt Brothers."

LIKE A NICKEL-PLATED .45 and just as cold, "William" Eisner's 1938 shoot-em-up strip is played out with the safety off!

JOE SIMON OVERHEARS AND LAUGHS OVER THE FILM CREW HUBBUB: "Why quit? It doesn't require a lot of heavy lifting!"

And Will?

A COMPLETE STORY
SHOOT 'EM UP
BY WILLIAM EISNER
TONY, HERE, IS DEAD - - I'M BOSS NOW! - - ANY BODY DONT LIKE IT? - -
- S SURE YER TOPS WID US - - - - BOSS!
THE HEADQUARTERS OF A SMALL GANG
OCT. 1ST.
GOT ALL DE DOUGH BOYS???
YEH! C'MON BOSS DE OL MAN'S TOO SCART TO DO ANY THING - - WE'LL BUS TE HIM UP
- WELL - I'LL JUST MAKE SURE - - YOU'RE TOO OLD TO LIVE M STERN - AN' I DONT LIKE YOUR FACE!!
BANG!
DEC. 8
OCT. 10
OCT. 20
AL BANK
TAKE YER TIME N THERE BOYS DIS COP WONT BOTHER US
SO - YOU RECOGNIZE ME EH?? WAL AINT DAT NICE!! - -
- I TOLD YOU NOT TO MAKE ANY NOISE!! - - - I'LL BE RIGHT 'WITCHA' BOYS - -
BANG!
P1

ANIMATION SEQUENCE: Let's do this epilogue in Eisner's impressionistic, style. Tenement background. CLOSE ANGLE ON WILL: "I work alone now pretty much, writing and drawing myself. I do my own lettering now, which I never did in my Spirit days. And I still have this abiding belief that this medium is capable of far more than just adventure and entertainment. In fact, it's happening now. I feel very, very vindicated in my early judgement."

AFTER TUDOR CITY, LONG AFTER, WILL STILL EXPERIMENTS, CREATES, STAGE MANAGES: "Lately I've been working on graphic novels. This last year I completed *Dropsie Avenue* (*the Neighborhood*) and am wrapping up on *Graphic Storytelling* and then I'll probably start on another graphic novel. Meanwhile *Graphic Storytelling*, which hopefully comes out Spring of '96, is all ready to go now. It will probably be published by my company *Poorhouse Press*, which publishes *Comics and Sequential Art*, and distributed to comic stores by *Kitchen Sink Press*."

"I haven't seen Will in a number of years," Berg laments, "The last time was at a dinner. He got up and spoke and singled me out to the audience, saying it was people like Davey Berg who set the pattern for what all the comic books are doing today, giving me credit for being an innovator and setting patterns which haven't changed since."

AND MUCH OF THAT CREDIT, BERG FEELS, GOES TO WILL, WHO HAD AN UNERRING INSTINCT FOR WHERE THE RICH VEINS OF POTENTIAL LAY IN HIS ARTISTS: "'Your real talent is in writing,' Will goes, and I didn't pay attention to it. I had no desire. It was a nice hobby, but I wanted to be an artist. Will says I was a writer, and it certainly turned out that they used me more as a writer. And here I am studying all those years to be an artist! There was a shortage of good writers. There still is, the whole thing is in the writing, and it's hard to get. Even with *MAD* it's very hard to get good writers. Of course the switch to *MAD* is a whole different thinking, it isn't comic books anymore. I really found myself at *MAD*. Everything I had done prior to that seems to go into it, a training ground. And now I was a commentator, and still am today. Although it's done with humor, there's a lot of thought that goes in behind it. I start off with a big idea, whittling it down to the bare essentials. In the '60s, there was a lot more writing in my thing. Now they've decided they want big pictures, so instead of four panels they say–'Do two panels.' So I can't write as heavy anymore. Everybody says they liked them more when there was more writing. Unfortunately we have people over us who say 'Now we want a big picture.' So, I enjoy the *drawing* of it, but feel hampered in the writing. I can't say everything I want to say. They are now selling my original artwork. The '60s and '70s *MAD* material, that twenty year period -now that's valuable. They're going for pretty good money.

"My wife played this part: she researched. I would tell her a month ahead what subject it's gonna be, and she would go to textbooks and so on and get me all the information, which I honed into story form with a punch line. Everybody says–'How do you know so much?' *I don't!* My wife looks it up! So that was a very good method. She loved doing it too, and she misses it."

Kotzky and I discuss Lou Fine. "I talked to Lou a few times in the '60s by phone. I would sometimes run into him coming out of his New York office, but we never really got together after that. He was doing a lot of advertising, in fact he would do as many as three of those third-page ads you see in the Sunday comics per week–a very good percentage. But later when television really took over, not only did he suffer but Johnstone & Cushing, a big outfit with many different artists working for them, just

about went out of business. Television really messed everybody up."

Tex and I are admiring a piece of Lou Fine twice-up original artwork, a *Black Condor* cover. Tex traces the delicate feathering with a fingertip: "Twenty, thirty years later I saw a photograph of him, you know? standing on his own without crutches. And I don't know whether they figured out a way to put braces on him so he could function without the crutches, or what. But he seemed to be maneuvering around..."

"If I hear one of the songs," he says more quietly, "that's a time machine. You hear one of the old songs, it jerks you back to that time, to Tudor City."

JOE SIMON REFLECTS BACK ON EISNER'S OPUS: "Will's artwork, much as my own artwork, has changed with the years according to who's working with him. Bob Powell was the same way. Will Eisner by himself–I loved his artwork, extremely creative." Simon feels nobody could set up a shot like comics' noir director: "I still remember his three dimensional logos which were masterpieces in themselves. I loved his work! Jack liked Will Eisner too."

"Will did just one style," Kotzky notes, "but what he did was very good. And his creative imagination in the writing field was marvelous. Somebody who established his own style and then led the way for all the others...Will Eisner."

FEIFFER CONSIDERS HOW EISNER'S CURRENT WORK HAS SEASONED INTO IMPRESSIONISM: "We've both gone our separate ways, but I think the sort of thing he's doing with *A Contract With God* and *Dropsie Avenue*–how he has evolved that storytelling aspect–is just wonderful. By the time I had left, the Spirit was mainly a walk-on character who would come in and tidy up the drama, which was almost always about other people in other situations. Now Will has taken those ancillary characters and subplots and socked them squarely in the foreground, and does it beautifully. The autobiographical aspects of the work especially intrigue me.

"Eisner belongs to a generation of rather witty cartoonists, something that seems to have vanished entirely. We now have comics on steroids essentially humorless, very ostentatious, and they take themselves oh so seriously. Frank Miller's stuff–as skillful an artist as he is–is wildly pretentious, and, because of that, funnier than he realizes.

"Often when you're a kid and go to work for somebody, admire someone, the years will put that person into a different perspective, you'd see them differently or think that the work really wasn't that great in the first place. Eisner is just the reverse of that.

"When I think back upon the creative work he did, I find it still way in advance of much that's going on today. Remarkable." Feiffer thinks back on the Jewish artist who delighted in creating Xmas fables, the protean creator who dreamed of P'Gell and Sand Saref, Skinny Bones and Sheena, Ebony White and the Blacknawks. "And simply in terms of our relationship and personal contact, it's been one of the great pleasures of my working life." His last three words are hushed. "I cherish it."

SO DOES KUBERT: "The main focus of what we do in this business is storytelling, and Will is the storyteller supreme!

"When he was teaching regularly at the art school at one of the better colleges in New York, Will often asked me to come and lecture his class, which I was more than happy to do, and he has come here to my school to address the students as well. It's been that kind of friendship. This is a relationship that started when I was eleven years old, and I'm a couple of years older than that now and it still maintains itself. I feel pretty much the same way about the guy. He's been terrific."

EISNER'S DE RIGEUR FOR A '40S BULL REQUIRED an ivory trenchcoat, flatnosed roscoe, deck of Luckys, gritty repartee... and plenty of india ink!

DAVE BERG WAS THE LAST TO LEAVE, HE GRABBED MY ARM: "When you speak to Eisner again, write this down, say to him, 'may your name be inscribed in the Book of Life.'"

BERG GRINNED AT MY CURIOUS LOOK: "Will's not a religious man, but he'll understand it." Then as the elevator doors were closing he added, almost as an afterthought "I always looked at him as a big brother."

NOTES TO STORY DEPARTMENT: With the crews gone, the giant crane cameras and elaborate sets broken down, the roof of the sky scraper is bare now–only a few loops of clipped celluloid, some sawdust, the foil wrapper from a bacon cheeseburger. I pull out my small spiral notepad and begin laboriously to write: Dramatist, businessman, flimflist, by 22 a crusty, wise old studio director, copiously wealthy at the tail end of the Depression, wandering the predawn alleys and docks of Manhattan, Will was the man we found behind the domino mask.

That's one version.

A more acceptable approximation of the truth comes from an understanding that half the life was lived creating the characters, the other–some say better half spent sharing that character's adventures with his team of artists.

That may be melodramatic or it may not. What matters here is that Will orchestrated as many real life characters as fictive ones (he gave Kubert, Feiffer, and Berg their first art jobs, after all, and most of the rest of the bullpen their first art jobs that really mattered.)

Enduring his enlightenment and awestruck by the speed of his successive creative ideas, the Tudor City crew found themselves as artists through a man who could see beyond a primitive portfolio into the gut of the artist instead: All I really needed to know, Will said, was whether they cared. ■

NOTE: Special thanks to the Tudor City crew, their boss, and to Ohio State University's Cartoon Research Library.

BY ARNOLD T. BLUMBERG

Get out your Do

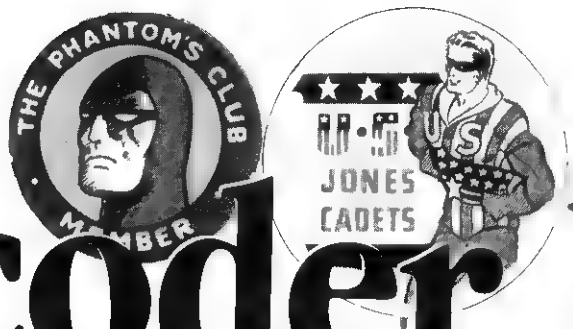
From the radio days to the present, character toypre

This six-foot Superman standee advertised the popular 1941 Fleischer cartoon movie.

THERE WAS A THRILL TO BE HAD WITH EVERY CRACKLE of static, every rustle of the page, as the announcer's baritone heralded the latest adventure of our hero. With eyes open wide and hearts beating fast, we longed to join the Lone Ranger as he rode into town and saved the day, or blast off into space with Buck Rogers on another cosmic mission. We shared the excitement as Little Orphan Annie encountered danger, and laughed at the wild antics of Howdy Doody.

The characters that leaped from our comics, radios, and televisions were our friends, and with just a few boxtops, coupons, and well-earned pennies saved over weeks and months, precious mementos of their adventures could be bought and cherished for years to come. These were the premiums that are now among the rarest and most sought after collectibles today; a Shadow magic ring, a glow-in-the-dark plastic treasure, now sells for $1,200 in Near Mint condition; a Captain Midnight display sign goes for as much as $3,000; and a Superman club patch, a swatch of cloth that symbolized your membership in the Supermen of America, is now a rare item that easily fetches $10,000 in the modern collectibles market.

The adventure and excitement may have been left behind with the passing of the years, but for those of us who still remember that glorious age of heroes, there is now a book that not only recaptures those days of wonder and imagination, but provides a comprehensive reference for all premium collectors. Gemstone's Steve Geppi, a man who knows a thing or two about collecting, has brought together two of the giants in the field, Ted Hake and Bob Overstreet, to pre-



Decoder Rings!

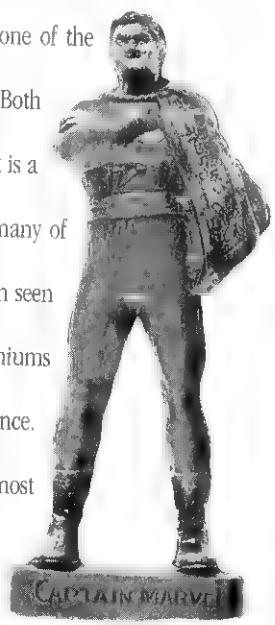
r toy premiums are pure pop-culture gold!

sent *Hake's Price Guide to Character Toy Premiums and Related Store Bought Items*, an exhaustive volume that features premiums from over 100 categories (including comics, statues, posters, buttons, pins, and store displays), with more than 300 characters from radio, television, and the comics represented.

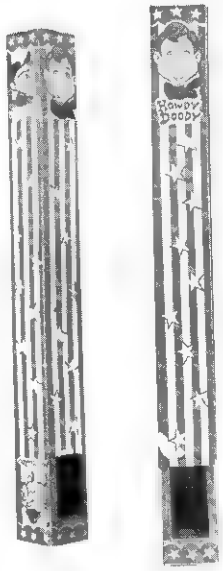
"Getting Ted Hake and Bob Overstreet together on a project has been one of our goals since we started Gemstone Publishing," says Steve. "*Hake's Price Guide* is more than the fulfillment of that goal; it's the realization of years of collecting and research poured into one amazing volume that is sure to change the face of premium collecting. As a collector myself, I can tell you that this is a book that no collector will want to be without."

Certainly there are many who share this view, Ted Hake being among them. "As a nation, we're very interested in what's gone before," Ted says. "Popular culture is something that ties a particular people to a particular time. Certain characters, for any number of reasons, have become part of our pop culture history. It's only natural that premiums carrying the likenesses of these characters would become sought after. As they become increasingly scarce, they increase in value, just like key Golden Age and Silver Age comics have." With interest in this area of collecting growing every day, *Hake's Price Guide* is poised to set the standard as the definitive toy premium reference work.

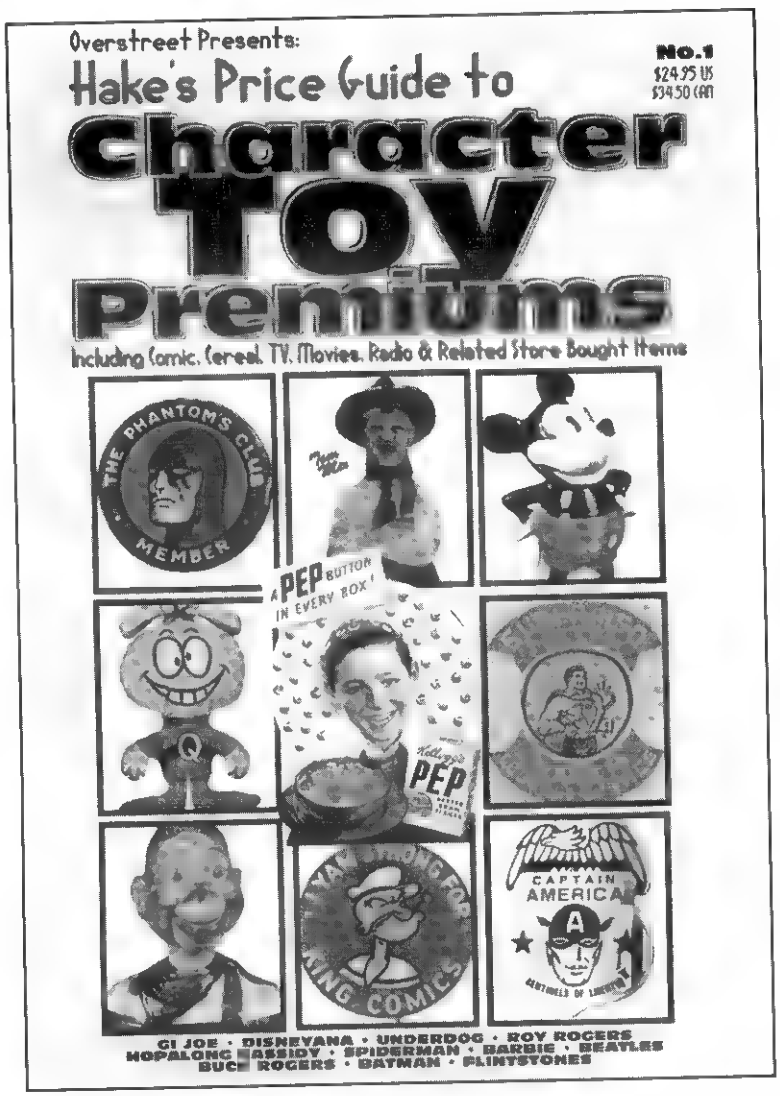
Many books have a similar number of categories and items, but *Hake's Price Guide* has a distinct advantage. "This book is the first of its kind," says Ted. "There are many fine guidebooks out there, but few of them have a photo for every listing. In our book, every one of the more than 5,000 listings has its own photo. Both in quality and quantity of material, this book is a collector's dream come true." In addition, many of these sought-after collectibles have never been seen or printed anywhere else, including toy premiums that are scarce, very rare, or no longer in existence. All this guarantees that this book will be the most complete guide to the past century of collectible premiums ever published



One of the popular Syroco-style figures, this five-inch Captain Marvel premium from 1945 is very rare, with less than ten known to exist.



Based on Ted Hake's more than thirty years of experience and research in the world of toy premium collecting, and with the additional input and guidance of Bob Overstreet, whose name has become synonymous with accurate price guides and references, This edition of *Hake's Price Guide* is sure to make history as one of the the most important chronicles of this rapidly expanding market. For anyone who collects the toys they remember from their youth, and for those who simply want a record of this exciting area of pop culture memorabilia, *Hake's Price Guide to Character Toy Premiums and Related Store Bought Items* will serve as an invaluable reference work for years to come. "From Star Wars to Superman, and from GI Joe and Buck Rogers to Batman and Spider-Man, *Hake's Price Guide* will be the definition of what a character toy premium collector would want in a guide book," says Bob Overstreet. "This is our first book in our new 7" x 10" deluxe format. Each listing is accompanied by a photograph and thoroughly researched. Collectors are going to be impressed with this book."


Overstreet Presents:
Hake's Price Guide to
Character Toy Premiums
Including Comic, Cereal, TV, Movies, Radio & Related Store Bought Items
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HOPALONG CASSIDY • SPIDERMAN • BARBIE • BEATLES
BUCK ROGERS • BATMAN • FLINTSTONES

Steve Geppi concurs. "As a publisher, I've been extremely lucky in that I don't publish just anything... I get to publish things about topics that I love. Ted Hake, with the expert help of Bob Overstreet, has invested a tremendous amount of time, effort and research into this book, and I think it shows. When collectors read it, I think they'll agree!" ■

TOP OF PREVIOUS PAGE - RARE PREMIUMS! Left to right: (1) The 1943 "Flash/Fastest Man Alive" button, featuring the famous character from Flash Comics. (2) The 1942 Don Winslow Golden Torpedo Decoder. (3) "The 1940's Phantom Club Member" button. (4) The 1941 "U.S. Jones Cadets" Comic Book Club button, originally part of a club member's kit. and (5) The highly detailed 1942 Little Orphan Annie Altascope Ring originally offered by Quaker cereal. The amazing ring can be used to sight airplanes and calculate their altitude.

ABOVE LEFT: A rare Howdy Doody periscope, offered by Wonder Bread in the 1950s.

MICHAEL AND RYAN AFTER FOUR SOLID DAYS OF COMIC BOOKS, TOYS, AND CONVENTION FUN.

TOM AND VIRGINIA FRENCH DISCUSS THE BEAUTY, RARITY, AND VALUE OF GOLDEN AGE COMICS WITH A CUSTOMER.

COLLECTORS ALAN BARTHOLOMEW AND BOB CASALI FINALIZE YET ANOTHER COMIC BOOK DEAL.

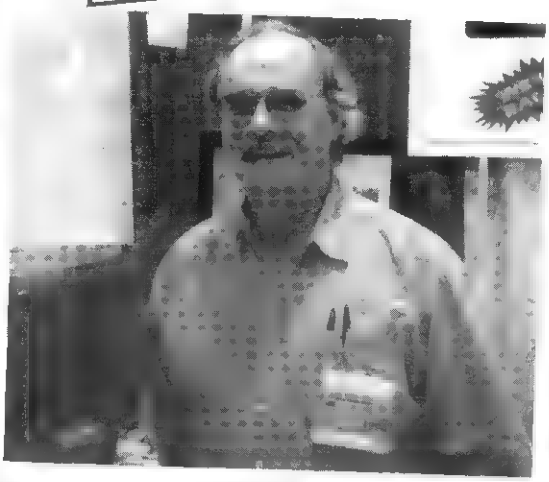


PHOTO-JOURNAL AUTHOR AND COMIC BOOK PRESERVATION PIONEER, ERNIE GERBER, GREETS CONVENTION-GOERS.

CBM SCA
1996 San Digo

EDITOR, JOHN MORROW, SHOWS OFF A RECENT COPY OF HIS FANZINE. . . THE JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR.

ROBERT ROTER OF THE PACIFIC COMIC EXCHANGE WAS A MEMBER OF THE FIRST NATIONAL GRADING SYMPOSIUM.

DISCOVERER OF THE MILE HIGH/ EDGAR CHURCH COLLECTION, CHUCK ROZANSKI POSED FOR CBM CAMERAS.

MICHAEL GOLDMAN (MOTOR CITY COMICS) SHOWS OFF A BOOK FROM A NEWLY ACQUIRED HIGH GRADE COLLECTION.

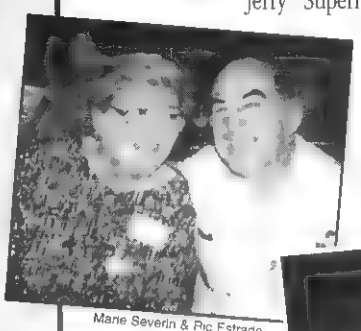
C RA P B O O K

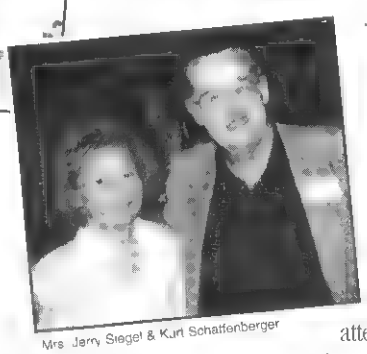
Diego Comic-Con

1996 AACC BANQUET
Event of the year!

"Historic! Fabulous! Outstanding!" These were just some of the superlatives heard throughout the evening of July 6th, 1996 at the 4th Annual National Meeting of the American Association of Comicbook Collectors held during the Comic Con International in San Diego.

A sellout crowd witnessed the historic first meeting of the "real-life" model for Lois Lane, Mrs. Jerome Siegel wife of the late Jerry "Superman" Siegel, and the man who defined the Lois Lane character for the Silver Age, this year's special guest of honor, Kurt Schaffenberger.


Marie Severin & Ric Estrada


Mrs. Jerry Siegel & Kurt Schaffenberger

Among those present to honor Mr. Schaffenberger were industry pioneers and notables Julius Schwartz, Gil Kane, Harry Lampert, Shelly Moldoff, Jim Mooney, Lucille Bliss, Roz Kirby, Roy Thomas, Joe Giella, Ric Estrada, and Marie Severin.

The intimate setting allowed everyone plenty of time for conversations, picture taking, and autographs. Thanks to Steve Geppi and Gemstone Publications, a special edition of the *Comic Book Marketplace* #38 was distributed to all those in attendance. The limited edition "plain white cover" issues were used by one and all to collect autographs and thumbnail sketches from the artists and special guests..

A framed and autographed copy of the dinner invitation was auctioned later in the evening and brought a high bid of $240 from Robert Rogovin of Four Color Comics and Stephen Fishler of Metropolis Collectibles.

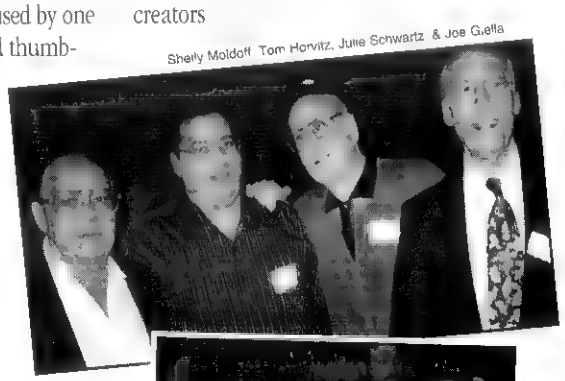
A special thanks is in order to the donors who contributed to this year's event: Alan Bartholomew, Jon Berk, Steve Geppi (Diamond International Galleries), Mike Dalessandro, Richard Evans (Bedrock City Comic Co.), Steve Fishler (Metropolis Collectibles), Jon Francis, Jeff Gelb, Jamie Graham (Graham Crackers Comics, Ltd.), Dan Greenhalgh (Showcase New England), Tom Horvitz (TRH Gallery), Jef Hinds (Comic Conservation Co.), Ed Jaster, Mervin Lee, James Loring, Susan Naiman, Mick Rabin, Bob Reid, Robert Rogovin (Four Color Comics), Marnin Rosenberg, David Siegel, Stephen Spence, Dr. John Townsend, Jerry Weist, and Scott Whaley.

"This was the best convention event I've attended in 10 years" said AACC Vice President Gary M. Carter."

"I never thought that I'd get a chance to sit down and socialize on a one-to one basis with my heroes of comicdom," remarked attendee Scott McAdam.

Special speaker of the night, DC editor Julius Schwartz, entertained the crowd with his own remembrances of Mr. Schaffenberger's contributions to the comic book industry and in particular to the Lois Lane legacy.

For many of the special guests, this was the first time they have had the opportunity to get together in many years. Everyone in attendance acknowledged the AACC for planning this historic, once-in-a-lifetime gathering of Silver Age and Golden Age creators


Shelly Moldoff Tom Horvitz, Julie Schwartz & Joe Giella

Mike Dalessandro & J. Keith Contarino

MURPHY ANDERSON
Paints Lou Fine Tribute

Inspired by the tremendous influence of Golden Age great Lou Fine, master artist Murphy Anderson will produce a series of cover recreations that memorializes Fine's influence on the field of comic art

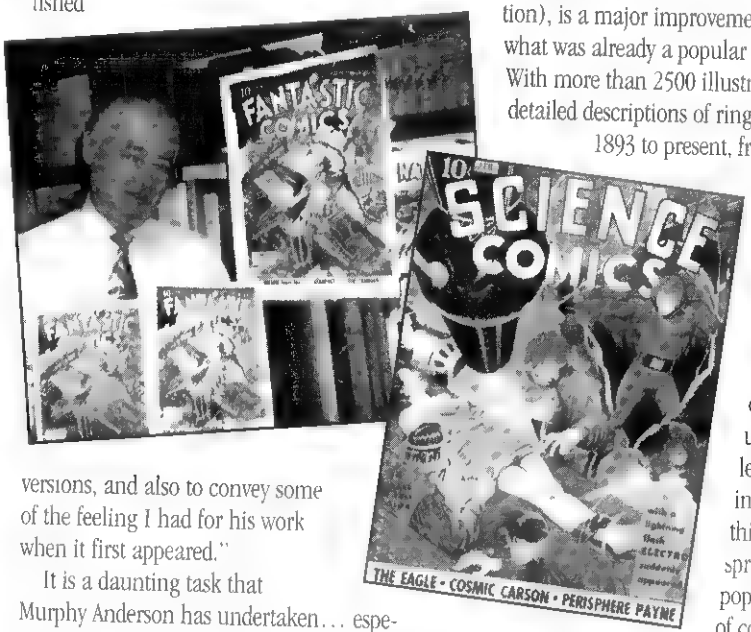
While Fine spent nearly forty years as a professional artist, his early work stands as a testament to his impressive talents and, it is this powerful period which most historians, fans, and collectors cherish above all else.

When asked why he wanted to undertake a project of this magnitude Murphy replied, "Lou Fine was a big inspiration to me. He brought a touch of class to the field. Lou was a tremendous artist who was very dedicated. Lou was one of the first artists to really take the time to do a good job."

Anderson's recreations will be in full color in a twice-up format. Distributed exclusively by Diamond International Galleries, some of the covers that he is pro-

ducing will include such Lou Fine classics as *Science* #1, *Fantastic* #3, *Mystery Men* #3, *National* #7, and *Hit* #1. These works will be on display at Diamond International Galleries in Timonium Maryland and will be for sale to the general public.

One of the goals Anderson wanted to achieve in this project was explained by him this way, "I'm trying to get some of the original details back in the reproductions that were lost in the originally published versions, and also to convey some of the feeling I had for his work when it first appeared."



It is a daunting task that Murphy Anderson has undertaken... especially considering Lou Fine's standing in the pantheon of comic art greats. Coupled with his great admiration for Fine's work, perhaps only a talent with the depth and experience of a Murphy Anderson can successfully translate and express these forceful and memorable images of the Golden Age.

As Murphy recently said "You can't go too high in your praise of Lou Fine. He was truly a pioneer."

HAKES COLLECTIBLES GUIDE debuts for character Toy Premiums, Overstreet Toy Ring Guide gets 2nd edition

While Golden Age and Silver Age prices continue to climb, and while the new comics market stabilizes after its precipitous drop, two comics-related areas are practically exploding with growth. Both toy ring collecting and character toy premium collecting are going through the roof in terms of attention and popularity, and Gemstone Publishing is offering collectors comprehensive guides to each of these fast-growing fields.

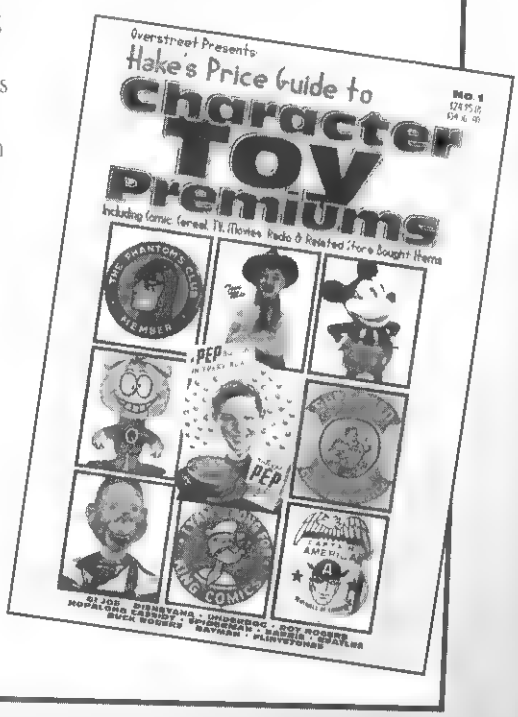
The Overstreet Toy Ring Price Guide, 2nd edition (titled The Overstreet Premium Ring Price Guide in its first incarnation), is a major improvement on what was already a popular guide. With more than 2500 illustrations and detailed descriptions of rings from 1893 to present, from the most common to the most rare, this book offers unparalleled insight into this widespread and popular area of collecting.

"We've added new sections, including sports rings, and thousands of new photos since the first edition," said author and publisher Robert Overstreet. "In writing, researching, and photographing this new edition with input of collectors all over the country, we've taken a giant step forward in toy ring collecting. This will be the guide for serious hobbyists and newcomers alike."

The second new guide from Gemstone represents the first collaboration between Overstreet and noted character toy premium expert Ted Hake. Hake's Price Guide to Character Toy Premiums and Related Store Bought Items is a standard-setting book of more than 600 pages, including a huge color section, of thoroughly detailed, photographed, cataloged and researched collectibles. In more than 100 categories (including comics, statues, posters, buttons, pins, and store displays), and with more than 300 characters represented, this comprehensive guide features not only the most popular items, but the rare, hard-to-find, and often the never-before-seen toy premiums collectors dream about. Based on Hake's more than 30 years of research and photography into Toy Premiums, this volume is sure to become the "bible" of the hobby.

"From Star Wars to Superman, and from G.I. Joe and Buck Rogers to Batman and Spider-Man, Hake's Price Guide will be the definition of what a character toy premium collector would want in a guide book," Overstreet said. "This is our first book in our new 7" x 10" deluxe format. Each listing is accompanied by a photograph and thoroughly researched. Collectors are going to be impressed with this book."

The Overstreet Toy Ring Price Guide, 2nd edition, is available in August, and Hake's Price Guide to Character Toy Premiums and Related Store Bought Items is scheduled to ship in October. Both books can be purchased at comic book shops, book stores, or direct from Gemstone Publishing. ■



App VF Action #1 Sells at Sotheby's for $61,900

With heads still reeling from the Sotheby's Auction and the San Diego Convention, collectors and dealers are trying to absorb the auction results and compare those to the present market. This task requires a lot of market savvy — and just as much luck! So far, I've heard just about every interpretation of the two events, but after careful study of the results one can only conclude a couple of things.

First, prices are still holding very firm for Silver, Gold and '50s books. Second, restoration on Golden Age books, for the most part, is not seen by most collectors as a gigantic detraction. This is proven every time a buyer votes on this issue with their pocketbooks.

After the first two days of buying in San Diego, the prediction that books priced under $1,000 would sell rapidly was confirmed. Those priced over that amount are selling very well if it was "the right book." (As you peruse the following, please note that an "*" indicates a Sotheby's Auction result with premium.)

Platinum Age (pre 1933)

Activity in this genre is only limited by the available product, and what collectors can learn about these books. Scarcity is the name of the game, and even if you want to get involved, the pursuit and reward is so difficult that many collectors are looking elsewhere to spend their collecting dollar. However, those that stay in this area of collecting do report occasional finds.

Sales: Bringing Up Father #2 VG $165, Banana Oil NN G $75, Clancy The Cop #1 FN $180; On The Links NN FN/VF $325.

Pre Golden Age/Golden Age (1933-1945)

Restored Gold was in abundance at Sotheby's, but that didn't seem to hold back buyers from energetic bidding. When one actually compares the auction estimates to the guide and then to the actual selling price, Golden Age actually sold for higher multiples than you think, and Jerry Weist should be given due credit for excellent results... sales that many of the uninformed in the open market have tried to ignore as they continue to "cry wolf" about slow sales.

What does this say? Many love to knock restoration, but regardless, the bottom line is that collectors still want a great book and they are willing to pay for it. On the other hand, a collection of low, low grade Gold was found here in the Northwest. We're talking centerfolds missing, stains, tears... even some that are brittle! All were priced at GD, and 95% sold within a week!

This suggests to me that perhaps that even a ragtag Human Torch #27 in FR or Black Terror #17 in GD- is still a bargain at the lower grades in the Guide.

Sales: Marvel Comics #1 VF $21,850*; Marvel Mystery Comics #2 App VG $2,070*, #3 FR-$550, #57 FR $70; Police Comics #1 FN $2587*; Green Lantern #1 App VF $5,175*; Superman #1 App FN $11,500* #3 App FN $1,380*; Detective Comics #28 App FN $4,025*, Action #1 App VF $61,900*, #2 FN $16,100*, #3 FN $6,900* #4 FN+ $8,625*, #7 FN $12,650*, #10 App FN+ $4,887*. Batman #1 App FN $7,475*, Sensation Comics #1 App VF $6325*, All-Star Comics #1 App FN $4,887*, Flash Comics #1 App FN-$6,325*, Human Torch 18 G- $88 Black Terror #20 FR $35, Leading #15 G- $40 Captain America #1 App FN $6,325*, #48 FR $98.

Post Gold/Pre Silver (1946-1956)

Hindsight only leads to sleepless nights, and anyone bidding at Sotheby's should have lost sleep over the lots of these great '50s books that were ignored by bidders. Granted, a few lots definitely set some records, but there were still plenty of bargains to be had. We can only hope that whoever purchased them did so for only one book, and the remainders will find their way to the market. Elsewhere prices and demand are escalating without much fanfare, and that is just the way collectors like it. Many *(continued on page 71)*

JOHN MURPHY • USA INC.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Enclosed is a report of books and the prices they sold for in our last auction. I thought the information might be informative for CBM readers, especially considering the new dynamics of the market.

Adventures into 3-D #1 NM $159.50, Attack On Planet Mars nn FN/VF $242, Big Town #1 FN/VF $412.50; Black Cat Mystery #42 VF $48.40, Black Magic V1/#1 VF $495, The Comics #1 FN/VF $880, Desperado #1 VF $67.10, Four Color #238 FN/VF $200.20, #256 VF $242, #27 VG $181.50, Fantastic Four #6 VF $665.50, House Of Mystery #160 VF $70.

Journal Of Frankenstein #1 VF/NM $121, Margie's Little Lulu #1 VF NM $440, Midnight Mystery #1 FN/VF $33, The Monster #2 VF $146.30, My Greatest Adventure #28 VF/NM $165, #81 VF $66, Mysterious Adventures #1 VF $302.50, #18 FN/VF $108.90, Mystery in Space #3 VF $539.40, Seven Seas #2 FN/VF $220, Shield Wizard #2 VG $293.70.

Strange Adventures #1 FN/VF $1,450.90, #2 FN/VF $387.20, #14 VF $193.60, SuperWorld #1 FN- $1,464.10, #2 FN $1,208.90, #3 VF $1,237.50, Tarzan #1 VF $880, Tex Morgan #1 NM $181.50, The Thing #16 NM $399.30, X-Men #38 NM $108.90.

GREG PHARIS & DAVE GRISEZ

SAN DIEGO COMICS & COLLECTIBLES

San Diego, California

Welcome to the post-San Diego (Oooops!) International Comic Con Market report. My how things have changed in the show's over 25 year history. In all of its respects I must *(continued on page 68)*

And yes, there was indeed a #105 in NM-, the very best I have ever seen. As it turned out, the sale of the 105 was the talk of the San Diego Convention as it sold to a dealer for an amazing $3,000.00!

The entire run was purchased from an old time collector who purchased each issue right off the stands and never even opened most of the issues. A collector who bought a number of the books said that he had compared them to his White Mountain books and the Wonder Woman's were just as white and structurally as sound as the White Mountain copies!

Some of the sales from this collection include Wonder Woman #79 FN+ $120, #94 VF $100, #95 NM $210, #96 NM $210, #97 NM $210, #99 NM $210, #100 NM $300, #101 NM $225, #102 NM $225, #103 NM $225, #105 NM- $3000, #107 VF+ $250, #108 VF/NM $200, #109 NM $240, #110 NM $225, #112 NM- $165, #113 VF+ $135, #115 VF/NM $135, #118 VF+ $160, #120 VF/NM $170, #123 VF/NM $120, #125 VF+ $120, $127 VF+ $75, #128 NM- $75, #129 VF+ $75, #130 NM $100, #132 VF/NM $80, #133 NM $80, #134 NM $80, #135 NM $80, #137 VF+ $65, #139 NM $80, #146 NM- $40, #149 NM $40, #152 NM $40, #153 NM $40

A few other Silver/Bronze sales include All Star Western #10 FN+ $80, Spider-Man #24 VF/NM $225, FF #4 VG $375, #52 NM $120; Inc Hulk #181 VF/NM $375, Journey Into Mystery #124 NM- $110, Lois Lane #2 VG/FN $225, #3 VG/FN $200, Silver Surfer #1 VF- $200, #15 VF+ $40, Strange Tales #79 VG+ $45, #89 GD/VG $200, Tales of Suspense #1 VG+ $625, #39 VG+ $700, Wonder Woman #105 GD $200

That's all for now! Keep the faith ■

Collectors should note that the opinions expressed in CBM Market Reports are solely those of the individual dealers and collectors who contribute them. Comic book values and prices listed here are subject to the above conditions. Seasoned hobbiests are acutely aware that comic book and collectible prices and values vary based on geographic location, time of year, and a number of other marketplace factors.

went to San Diego to find those elusive titles, but so far these books are just not out there to be found.

Phantom Lady #17 VG $1,500; Journey into Mystery #2 VF $595; Law Breakers #1 FN $85; Snafu #1 VG $40; Terrific Comics #16 VF $100; Sugar & Spike #1 FN $485; Seven Seas #5 VF $1,650; Dynamic #20 FN $395, Famous Crimes #2 VF- $198; Jumbo Comics #165 NM $225, Mystery Tales #1 VF/NM $850; Nightmare #12 FN $145; Out Of This World #1 (56) VF $186; Private Eye #1 FN $88; Don Fortune Magazine #3 FN; VF $90, Eerie #1 ('51) FN $250;

Silver Age (1956-1969)

For those that withdrew or pulled back from the Silver Market, watching the auction results or hearing of recent sales, has left them slightly confused. As if they don't recognize what is going on, or somehow the market has left them behind. In some regards it has. New trends, new focus, and new insights have collectors scooping up the bargains, much to the dismay of those that had "cut their teeth" on the Silver Age run-up of 1991-1994.

Sales: Our Army At War #81 FN $650, #91 G $148; Action #270-315 VF+ $1,955* the lot, Amazing Fantasy #15 FN $6,325*, Amazing Spider-Man #1 FN $4,025*; Journey Into Mystery #83-85 VF $2,185* the lot; Showcase #4 FN $6,700; Brave & Bold #1 G $350; #34 VF+ $1,320; Wonder Woman #105 VF/NM $3,000; #159 VF/NM $85; World's Finest #94 FN $225; Justice League #22 VG $52; House Of Secrets #1 VF $1,200; Green Lantern #1 FN $ 875; Fantastic Four #1 App FN $1,265*; #1 FN $6,000; Avengers #2 NM $710; Batman #171 FN $210.

Bronze Age (1970-1979)

Those feeling a bit lonely by trying to collect those post-War books will find some great company with the 70s collectors. Last convention season, we wanted to believe that these books just were not available because dealers hadn't bothered to hunt them down or bring them to the conventions. After a year of articles and collector requests we thought we could find some at this year's convention. Not so. But, what key '70s books are out there are selling to a very receptive and growing audience. Keep your eye out for the new scarce and esoteric book that the market has discovered - Super DC Giant #5-13.

Sales: Weird War #1 VF/NM $98; Marvel Spotlight #2 VF $75, #12 NM $24; Marvel Premiere #3 NM $38; Marvel Special Edition #15 NM $30; Tomb Of Dracula #1 NM $70; Marvel Team Up #1 NM $140; Peter Parker #1 NM $42; #27 NM $18; Spidey #1 NM $12; First Issue Special #8 NM $18; Hulk #181 NM $425; Detective #437 NM $20; Hot Wheels #6 NM $60; Iron Fist #14 NM $135; Werewolf By Night #32 NM $125; Super Girl #1 NM $18; Legion Of Superheroes #1 NM $32; Daredevil #81 NM $22, #158 NM $110; Young Romance #198 NM $26.

With three of the largest and most important events in our hobby happening within such a short time-frame, the effects of the Chicago Con, Sotheby's, and the San Diego Con are being watched very carefully by the entire hobby this Summer. The amazingly diverse opinions about these effects that are coming from every corner of the comic book marketplace... and they only add to the excitement. Even with the varying opinions, collectors are still avidly searching for items of interest... especially the new and undiscovered.

Before we all jump to reckless conclusions about market slowdowns and join those who always cry wolf at the drop of a hat... everyone needs to revisit sales information and really take a hard look at the results. What was the quality of the books being offered? Were items over priced and did this cause reduced sales? And, if great books didn't sell, why? There's always a reason.

And on a final note, even if a convention or auction suggest to those in attendance a slow market (imagined or not) it's worth remembering that these events are actually attended by a small percentage of hobbyists. And although it may be an indicator of market's temperament, a sample does not a market make! ■

HERE'S WHAT I THINK!

SHAWN HAMILTON

More Thoughts on Detective Dan

Without a doubt the June issue of Comic Book Marketplace (#36) was the most interesting and enlightening issue to date! It is going to be very difficult to top this one. (We can't expect CBM to rewrite comic history every issue.) But the discovery of the Argosy Files does exactly that; it forces us to re-evaluate several of the accounts of early comic history, that till this time were considered accurate. Obviously the most important is the role of M. C. Gaines as the "father" of the modern comic book. Gaines is no longer the first to affix a 10¢ cover price to a comic nor is he the first to sell said book on the newsstand. We also need to examine more closely the possible influences on early publishers of original material, specifically Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson. I believe that Lloyd Jacquet may have played a much more important role than what is now thought to be correct.

However, the real reason that I am writing is to propose a possible addition or revision to the early history of Superman. Gary, you mentioned in your editorial that you felt that Siegel & Shuster had at least seen and were probably influenced by Detective Dan and Ace King. I would like to expand on that idea by suggesting that Siegel & Shuster were not only aware of these books, but that they actually used those two books to fashion a presentation copy of Superman to Humor publishing that fit Humor's house style! It would seem to make perfect sense that when they knew that they were going to pitch Superman to Humor publishing, that they would adapt Humor's lettering style, layout, etc. to resemble books that Humor had already published!

Allow me to build my case by pointing out the similarities that I see when comparing all three covers at one time: (I have enclosed illustrations with matching #'s to my examples).

Example #1 The already mentioned (your editorial) example of the linked OO's as well as the use of the phrase "A story in cartoons" used on both Ace King and Detective Dan.

Example #2 The lettering style noted in ex. 2 is most prominent on Ace King (notice "The" specifically).

Example #3 The obvious use of the 10¢ price tag - taken directly from Detective Dan.

Example #4 Compare the cityscape from Detective Dan and that of the Superman cover; although I am no expert on Shuster artwork, this does not look like a typical Shuster background, it does however look very much like the cityscape from Detective Dan.

Example #5 The similar appearances of the criminal thugs on both Detective Dan and the Superman cover. Note the dark jacket, same style hat, crooked nose and a more than passing resemblance of the two faces.

Example #6 The similar styles of the Ace King logo and the Superman logo (most notably the "A").

Example #7 Possibly the strongest evidence to support my theory is that the other surviving early Superman cover from this period has none of the characteristics of the Humor Publications, suggesting that the one cover was prepared expressly to impress Humor Publications. (Perhaps this is why Shuster burned the book when the deal fell through with Humor; he must have been very angry especially if he had one a considerable amount of extra work to emulate Humor's publications; it also could have served no purpose to keep it!)

It is a shame that Siegel or Shuster had never mentioned who they had dealt with specifically at Humor. It could have explained a great many things if certain people like Lloyd Jaquet were involved.

Now, before CBM receives a deluge of mail wanting to defend Mr.'s Siegel and Shuster from an attack on their originality, let me clarify that I would simply like fandom to consider my idea that Siegel and Shuster had endured even more trials and tribulations than we had thought when trying to sell the most influential character in comics. (And that they were pretty savvy kids to boot!!)

One other note of interest: the artist on Ace King - Martin Nadle must be the Golden Age DC artist Martin Naydell. The styles are amazingly similar and according to Jerry Bail's Who's Who of Comics, Naydell even worked on Slam Bradley (now ain't that interesting!!).

Best wishes and continued success for CBM.

KEITH CONTARINO

Restoration...yechhh!

I'm finally back home for a week and have finally reacclimated to Eastern time. First few days back were a lot of fun, dinner at midnight etc., and I'm enjoying sweating profusely in this fine Georgia heat, pity the poor Olympic athletes.

Let me say how absolutely terrific it was to attend my first San Diego Con and finally meet, in person, the whole Left Coast gang. It was a trip talking to face to face with you Gary, Michael Naiman, Bill Howard, Bob Casali and everyone else I met and can't think of right now (brain damage from Southern California sun rays). It was also very interesting to find out that even with low humidity, the Southern California sun rays apparently are as brain damaging as my Georgia sun. How else can

anyone explain that Mick Rabin (Hi Mick!) actually has an entire group of fellow dilettantes that worship the ground that Sgt. Rock walks on. I took an informal poll of collectors out there and almost NO ONE East of the Mississippi prefers Rock to Fury. In fact, it was almost universal that while it is true most collectors is my age group (40-50) read Rock, all left him for Fury in 1963. You guys also missed a wonderful dinner (special thanks to Susan Naiman). I had a thrill of a lifetime chowing down with Joe Giella and his family.

I understand that attendance was way down. Hopefully the Republicrats and Demicons will leave your city alone in the future. Why can't politicians have their cons in Des Moines or Omaha? Leave the good places to us collectors, please!

The panel discussion I was invited to be on was interesting to say the least. If one thing can be gleaned (or glommed) from this First Symposium on Comic Grading, it's that we're all going to have to agree to disagree. Combination grades are here to stay and , know what? I don't think Ye CBM editor really has that much of a problem with them. After talking to Gary and Bill Howard, I left with the distinct impression that what you really object to is their misuse, especially the grades of VF/NM and FN/VF.

I agree with Bill H. wholeheartedly that, as far as mail-order is concerned, virtually all books graded VF/NM are VF or VF-. I agree with you Gary that the misuse of combination grades is rampant in mail-order. But, I see the same misuse and abuse of number systems and using the plus and the minus after nomenclature grades. How many times have you seen NM90's or VF+++++'s offered only to receive good old fashion VF or less.

I'm now of the opinion that we are only arguing semantics. There is no difference between one person's VF/NM and another's VF+ and yet another NM-. What is important is accuracy, honesty, and full disclosure. Next year we need to talk about restoration and pricing. Steve Fishler accurately articulated nicely that the market is what drives dealers and collectors to restore Golden Age books. Taking a GD/VG Action #1 and having it restored to an apparent FN?VF makes no sense unless that apparent FN?VF becomes much more valuable than the GD/VG plus cost of the restoration. Right now, it does. We won't be able to convince people to stop restoring these books unless we convince them the restored books are overpriced.

For example, it would be nice to see the Price Guides take the bold necessary step and clearly state that unrestored Fine Golden Age books are always worth more than restored apparent VF's or better. As far as Silver Age goes, we all agreed that unless done to save a book, absolutely NO RESTORATION should be done. I'd go a step further and say LEAVE SILVER AGE BOOKS ALONE!! There are plenty available in ALL grades.

The saddest thing that happened to me at the Con (besides having my Weird Sci-Fantasy Annual #2 damaged while it was being improperly removed from the mylar) was meeting an old customer and looking at the Silver Age keys he had brought to sell. Literally, every book (except a Fine Amazing Fantasy #15 I had sold him) had been cleaned, color touched, and/or had paper added. Books like Jimmy Olsen #1; Flash #105; Lois Lane #1; Showcase #4; Fantastic Four #1 and Challengers #1 would all have been easily sellable... had they been left alone! instead, they were all made less desirable and worth less because someone messed with them. Again, it makes no sense to fool around with Silver Age books. I hope everyone leave them alone!!!!

Again, thanks to everyone for an enjoyable 3 days... I'm looking forward to next year. Keep an eye out in CBM for future rantings and ravings of this particular madman. Ye editor and I have cooked up an idea for regular (or semi-regular) column from yours truly. If you think it might be something of interest, write to CBM and let 'em know.

PHIL BARNHART

Are You A Comic Book Geek?

I keep hearing this grumbling about the high prices on Golden Age material and the demise of this hobby as we know it. Not only do we see ever escalating prices in the mainstream titles of companies like DC and Timely, but we are also witness to the same sadistic trend creeping into the offbeat titles of companies like Continental and Chesler. A prime example here is the Catman title. Some issues in this run have appreciated at a phenomenal rate. For example, if you were offered a Catman #28 in very fine condition at $600 five years ago, most of you might have scoffed at the multiple of guide and looked elsewhere. Today it seems an absolute bargain! At some point price resistance is inevitable, and that level of resistance is different for every collector. Eventually we become acclimated to the new prices, but it does not necessarily follow that we accept it. I think we all judge the relative value of any book by asking ourselves if we could at the very least break even if we needed to sell it. Do these books really merit these price increases? As always, it comes down to supply and demand. There is seldom a "good time" to buy scarce Golden Age books, especially if you have spent countless hours scouring ads and talking to geeks similar to yourself on the phone. You know how difficult it is to obtain some of those books. If you are looking for bargains buy Little Lulu!

When I first began collecting golden age books I quickly decided that the superhero D.C and Timely titles weren't for me. It was logistically impractical and a seemingly insurmountable financial burden to attain enough of these books to warrant calling them a "collection". Then came the Gerber's Photo Journal Guide, our road map to unexplored treasures. I finally had all of those great covers at my disposal to match against the ads that I dutifully perused each week; but then, so did everyone else in possession of the Journal! The race was on!!

That was several years ago. How many of those books priced just under $100 then are now priced at $1,000 or more? Don't get me wrong. I like to add up the total current glue sniffing value of my own collection as much as the next guy, and I like to base that value on the same prices that I just whined about being

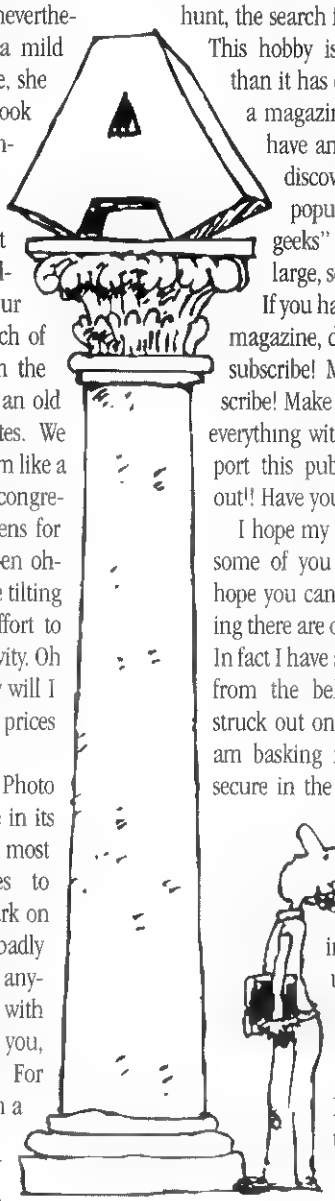
too high from the buyers point of view. We collectors are a strange lot, aren't we? You see, somehow I manage to justify my hobby with the pretense that my collection is now worth many times what I originally invested in it. Ah ha, there is that accursed word I hear so many collectors use: ... "investment!"

I must admit, I too am guilty of uttering the same words to my wife in the vain attempt to convince her that I "need" that book. I further justify the need by adding that "Do you know how much this book is really worth?" or "This is really a good deal, do you know how hard this book is to find?" We are pitiful! She has heard these old standby excuses before and has become somewhat jaded to them; nevertheless, she humors me and takes a mild interest in my enthusiasm. You see, she knew long before I that comic book collectors are in dire need of counseling. We are always in pursuit of what we do not have, or worse, upgrading to better copies of what we do have. We "need" it for our collections. We are "investing" in our future. Face it, we are just a bunch of guys that like nothing more than the nostalgic rush of paging through an old comic and admiring its attributes. We indulge ourselves in what must seem like a bizarre ritual to an outsider. We congregate to examine potential specimens for our collections. We splay them open oh-so-carefully and sniff at them while tilting them this way and that in an effort to admire each specimens ink reflectivity. Oh god how I pity this addiction! How will I manage to fuel my habit if these prices continue to go up??

I again turn to the Gerber's Photo Journal for guidance I find solace in its pages because I can find new (and most importantly, undervalued) titles to search for! I can once again embark on my quest for gold and obtain that badly needed fix for my addiction. If at anytime you felt as if you could identify with me or that I could be describing you, take comfort, you are not alone. For those of you who claim to maintain a distance from an addiction to a hobby like I have described .... YOU ARE IN DENIAL! The first step to recovery is admitting you have a problem.

This hobby is far from the imminent collapse forecasted by the doom and gloomers. The higher prices for any given title or individual book only makes them attainable by a select few. The interest in those books wanes and the beleaguered masses trudge off in search of new fodder. Once forgotten, someday we will return to these same books and re-discover them all over again. By then they will seem cheap!?

It is not the potential monetary gain that spurs us on. It is the sense of wonder, discovery, and satisfaction in finding that one book that we have feverishly pursued. The fun is in the hunt, the search for your own Holy Grail. This hobby is as strong or stronger than it has ever been. Only through a magazine like the CBM can we have an open forum where our discoveries can be shared. The population of "comic book geeks" is not overwhelmingly large, so we must stick together. If you have not subscribed to this magazine, do so! Make your friends subscribe! Make your parents subscribe! Make your boss subscribe! Do everything within your power to support this publication. Get the word out!! Have you got the point?



I hope my little treatise has helped some of you with your affliction, I hope you can take comfort in knowing there are others out there like you. In fact I have already separated myself from the beleaguered masses and struck out on my own once again. I am basking in the self satisfaction, secure in the knowledge that I have procured a few more issues from a couple of intriguing, and most importantly, undervalued esoteric titles that you have all overlooked! Since I still need a few more issues, I dare not tell you what they are! The race is on and I am ahead!! Viva la CBM!!! ■

CBM

We'd like you to write for us!

Contact the CBM Editoral Department

619•437•1996

Continued from page 13

nothing to do with Xmas. It's Wow #7, Bulletman #8, Whiz #35, Captain Marvel #16 & Spy Smasher #7. All of these books were published in October 1942. Xmas #2 came out in December 1942. I am led to believe that these were not remainder books (because of only a two month lapse between their publication and that of Xmas #2). If anyone can substantiate that they were indeed published with the "annual" in mind and not just to get rid of an overstock of books, it would answer a long standing question of mine.

If you can find either Xmas #1 or #2 (not an easy task), pick them up! The book value is ridiculously low and any one of these books singularly guides at about the same price as getting all five in Xmas 1 & 2. Excluding the covers, these books have nothing to do with Christmas, but I guess you already figured that out! Talk with you soon,

Gary Slusser, California

Paul Gambaccini Writes

Enjoyed CBM's #34 & #35 immensely. The Dick Sprang tribute was long overdue. I took pleasure from overhearing two fans talking in a comic shop. "You mean he was that young when he was doing BATMAN?" They were genuinely awestruck... the feeling we all get from our favourite artists.

I'm pleased you mentioned his work in Real Fact #1. This is one of my secret treasures. It has work from many DC greats of the time, but that isn't the reason. A lot of 1940's books have work by several fine artists. No, this book is special because the artists are signing their full names. It isn't "Dick Sprang", it's "Richard Sprang". There's "George Roussos" and "Fred Ray, Jr.". And yes, here are "Joe Simon and Jack Kirby", not "Simon and Kirby". My theory is that they were all juiced up by the prospect of being in a "real", or "serious", comic, and wanted to sign their work with pride.

Speaking of Kirby, your wonderful squarebound giant special made me consider my favourite books of this type. I'll have to choose two with special personal meaning. One is Fantastic Four Annual #1, which I managed to get both Stan and Jack to autograph in the year of its issue. I can tell because Stan's inscription reads "Save this autograph, Paul - it may be worth a nickle someday - Stan Lee 11/63". It didn't bother me that he misspelled "nickel"; I was tickled (tickeled?) that Stan and Jack bothered to sign books for a fan. I wonder when they stopped doing that together?

My other personal gem giant is the Salida copy of Vacation Parade #1, which I acquired from Robert Rogovin. William P. Howard writes in his fine article, "Before I die, I hope to see a high grade copy." He is welcome to fly to London anytime to view this beauty. Don't get too excited, William, it isn't true near mint, but it does have white pages and lacks the "nasty spine roll" you cite as a usual problem. I'm still knocked out by Barks' achievement with this issue, particularly the splash and the forest fire sequence.

May I add in this period of fascination with "good girl" art a true oddball issue that we may have to call an example of "good guy" art. Believe it or not, and I know it's hard to believe, Harvey Comic Hits #52 is a transvestite issue, and the transvestite is Steve Canyon! Milton Caniff's straight arrow in drag, I hear you cry? Yes, it's true... but all in the line of duty! It seems the nurses on base are being mugged by Communist infiltrators. Steve and Sgt. O'Hooley dress as women to entice the Reds into trying to molest them. "Mighty quiet, Major!", the Sergeant observes, pretending to be asleep in red wig and green robe. "Should I mebbe snore a little...or do nurses snore?" "Sh-h-h!" commands Canyon. "Someone's coming!" Sure enough, it's a trio of Asian Communists. In a two-page sequence without dialogue that would do Frank Miller proud, the two "nurses" thrash the three unshaven brutes. Steve Canyon is, of course, fetching in his black wig and pink robe. So, "good girl" and transvestite fans, there it is, awaiting a sudden price surge in the guide—Steve Canyon's Air Power, Harvey Hits #52!

Keep up the good work, Gary. I'll just take off this wig and robe and take this letter to the post office. Best wishes,

Paul Gambaccini, England

Squarebound Giants

My usual delight at reading a new issue of CBM is in seeing a lot of covers of

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comic books I don't own; imagine my surprise, and additional delight, at seeing a lot of covers in issue #35 that I do own. During the '50s and early '60s (and again in the early '80s) I picked up a lot of squarebound giants, then cheap and available

During my growing-up years in the '50s, the seasons were dictated by what giant issues appeared on the stands. Looking over my collection it appears that the three seasons of the year were summer, Halloween and Christmas.

The squarebound giants were a genuine bargain. With an allowance of 50¢ a week in those Eisenhower days I had to be awfully picky at the comic book rack, and the giants usually won my money due to their sheer bulk and value. (I assume that was a marketing consideration of the publisher, also.)

Going to my shelves, and with no regard for anything but my own opinion, I've prepared a list of my favorite giant comic books, grouped by type, and also by how they have held up editorially in my own mind after many years.

1. Disney: Mickey Mouse Club Parade #1, 1955. Forget the curmudgeonly comment about this book in Overstreet that shows up year after year. I don't own the original "Phantom Blot" Four Color and this giant still looks pretty good to me after over 40 years, re-drawn and re-colored scenes and all.

Walt Disney's Vacation Parade #1, 1950. So much has been written about this giant that anything I could say would be redundant, but this might be one of the top giant comics of all time, maybe even the best

2. Warner Bros: For some reason, the Warner Bros. comics have never gotten the respect I think they deserve They were funny, well-drawn, and entertaining, and these early giants are very collectible:

Bugs Bunny Christmas Parade #1, 1950 132 pages;

Bugs Bunny Halloween Fun #1, 1953 Great painted covers;

Bugs Bunny Vacation Funnies #1, 1951 The lead story in this giant, "Bugs Bunny and the Cat People", (29 pages) and the Christmas Parade #1 lead, "The Days Before Christmas", (31 pages) are excellent examples of why the early Bugs Bunny Four Color issues are so good, since they were apparently written and drawn by the same folks

3. John Stanley: John Stanley was a genius comic book writer, who perfectly understood how to write a comic book story that could appeal to all ages. He was funny, and prolific His career spread over more than 20 years, which spans these giants:

Little Lulu and Alvin Storytelling Time #1, 1959. Someone at Western Publishing rightfully decided that readers loved the screwy stories that Lulu would tell Alvin, and reprinted a book full of them, going back to 1948;

Nancy and Sluggo Summer Camp, Dell Giant #34, 1960: This is not listed in Overstreet as being by Stanley, but trust me, it is. As someone who has read his work for over 40 years I can spot a Stanley story anywhere. Yow!;

Tales From the Tomb #1, 1962. Done after Western split from Dell. Stanley combines ghost and monster stories and his won macabre, funny imagination to make this a totally entertaining book. Art is just so-so, though;

Tubby and His Clubhouse Pals #1, 1956 I was Tubby, both in body, deed and thinking. It's scary to see my childhood re-created in this 40-year old giant comic. Was Stanley in my head in those years? Shudder.

4. Miscellaneous Giants: Many comic book companies made squarebound giants over the years. These are some more that I think are exceptional·

Dennis the Menace in Hollywood, Giant #7, 1959. These travel giants, of which this is my favorite, were so popular that they were reprinted several times. Fred Toole wrote them, and gifted cartoonist Al Wiseman, drawing in Hank Ketcham's style, drew them.

Little Archie #18, Spring, 1961. Over 80 issues of Little Archie were in giant size, surely some sort of record. I liked this one in particular because it featured "Little Archie On Mars" by Bob Bolling

Pogo Parade #1, 1953 Outstanding collection reprinted from Dell's Animal Comics

Supermouse, The Big Cheese, Summer Holiday Issue, 1957 This appears to be mostly reprints, but the lead story, "Monsters on the Loose", which I believe is drawn by Gene Fawcette, is a beauty

5. DC Giants: I don't know if DC issued a squarebound giant before 1961, but the release dates were published in the ads for these early ones, so my brother and I stood by the comic book rack while the druggist put them out on sale:

Batman Annual #1, 1961, and Secret Origins #1, 1961. Some editorial oddities in both of these annuals: Batman has changed story titles, and Secret Origins has some glaring editorial flaws (a truncated "Challengers of the Unknown" origin by Kirby and Green Arrow's origin reduced to a text retelling) but these annuals also introduced me to stories I had not seen before.

Superman #252 (DC 100 Page Super Spectacular #13), June, 1972. Subtitled "The World's Greatest Flying Heroes!" it contained 100 pages of classic tales from DC's bottomless vault, including two 1942 Luthor stories, two Lou Fine stories reprinted from Quality, a Jack Burnely Starman, a wrap-around cover by Neal Adams–but why go on? One of the best 100-page specials And all for 50¢!

Annuals, giants, specials, whatever the publisher chose to call them, were a bargain when they were published, and are well worth searching out. As William P. Howard said in his article on Dell Giants in CBM, some giants are rarely found in anything but lower grades, and none of my personal copies would qualify as even a Very Fine, but that would be some of the appeal, too.

Par Holman, Utah

I have found Pogo Parade #1 to be one of the Dell Annuals that is the most difficult to find in grade. Thanks for writing Par, it's nice to hear from someone who shares my passion for squarebound comics.Thanks to all who wrote in this month… and thanks also to all our contributors. If you'd like to see your letter in print, send it to:

E-MAIL US AT:
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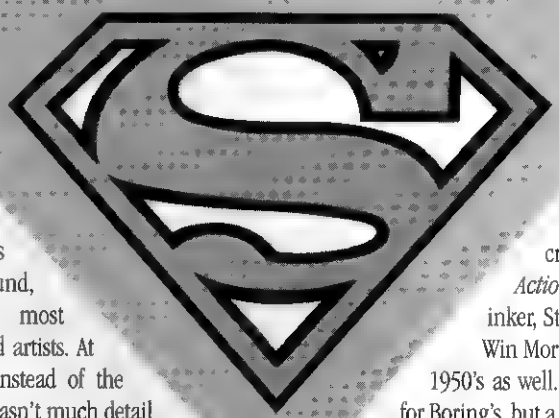
The Evolution of Superman's Shield!



Superman's shield–its basic pattern has never changed, and yet it has evolved, moved around, changed its size–and, most important of all, changed artists. At first, it was a triangle instead of the familiar pentagon we know today. There wasn't much detail at all on the cover of *Action* #1 as drawn by Joe Shuster –just a yellow triangle with a squiggly "S".

The triangle remained through *Action* #24, also drawn by Joe Shuster. But with issue #25, Superman's shield was taking on a more modern look. This is the first Action cover to be drawn by a young assistant named Wayne Boring, and the first emblem with five sides–though Boring was still far from fleshing out what would become the ultimate Superman shield.

The shield as a pentagon was established by this time, though an occasional artist, such as Fred Ray on *Action* #34, would revert to a triangle. But soon, Ray and all other artists were emulating the Wayne Boring S. With issue #36, Ray began to give the S a more distinctive shape. The evolution continued, and by *Action* #50, a definite pattern had emerged that Boring was now using as well. (Strangely enough, Joe Shuster's cover painting on the cover of the George Lowther hardback novel actually looked more modern, though it was also 1942.)

What is the first Action cover with the S drawn essentially as we now know it? My candidate for that is *Action* #64, drawn by little known Superman artist Ed Dobrotka. The shield, visible on Superman's cape, clearly shows all components of the modern S. From that cover on, the differences in the S simply amounted to style nuances of the penciler and inker.

No artist has ever drawn the shield quite like the great Wayne Boring. In the late '50's, at the peak of his powers, Boring constructed a Superman shield that might have been a great crest of Krypton. The curve of the lines was totally unique, and served to make other renditions seem plain by comparison. Boring was a frequent cover artist beginning with *Action* #25 and continuing through #231. With #232, the late Curt Swan began a long string of *Action* covers, with Boring returning for one more cover on *Action* #353 in 1967. (Boring was not to draw another *Action* cover, though he did get credit for interior work on the cover of *Action* #561. Unfortunately, his long time inker, Stan Kaye, was no longer available.)

Win Mortimer did his share of *Action* covers in the 1950's as well. His S emblem was sometimes mistaken for Boring's, but a close look always revealed Mortimer's S to be a little squatter with a fatter middle; Boring's S was always perfectly proportioned. Al Plastino, another significant and usually overlooked Superman artist of the Golden Age, drew a more haphazard S (such as *Action* #213) that wasn't as proportional as Boring's.

When the late Curt Swan took over as cover artist on #232, he inherited Stan Kaye, Boring's great inker. Boring and Kaye had practically developed the look of the S together, and some of that magic carried over into Swan's work--as long as Kaye was the inker. Once other inkers started finishing Swan's pencils, such as George Klein on issue #285, the S began to look less like Boring's and more like the present day S–only smaller. (You'll note that most of the artists drawing the Superman S today draw it exactly the same. The classic Boring style seems to be lost.)

With #356, Neal Adams began to draw *Action* covers, with an S that was quite unique when compared to Swan, and sometimes seemed top heavy as on #359. Kurt Schaffenberger, famous for his Lois Lane work, contributed at least two covers with an S that looked very much like the present day Jerry Ordway shield. (*Action* #476.)

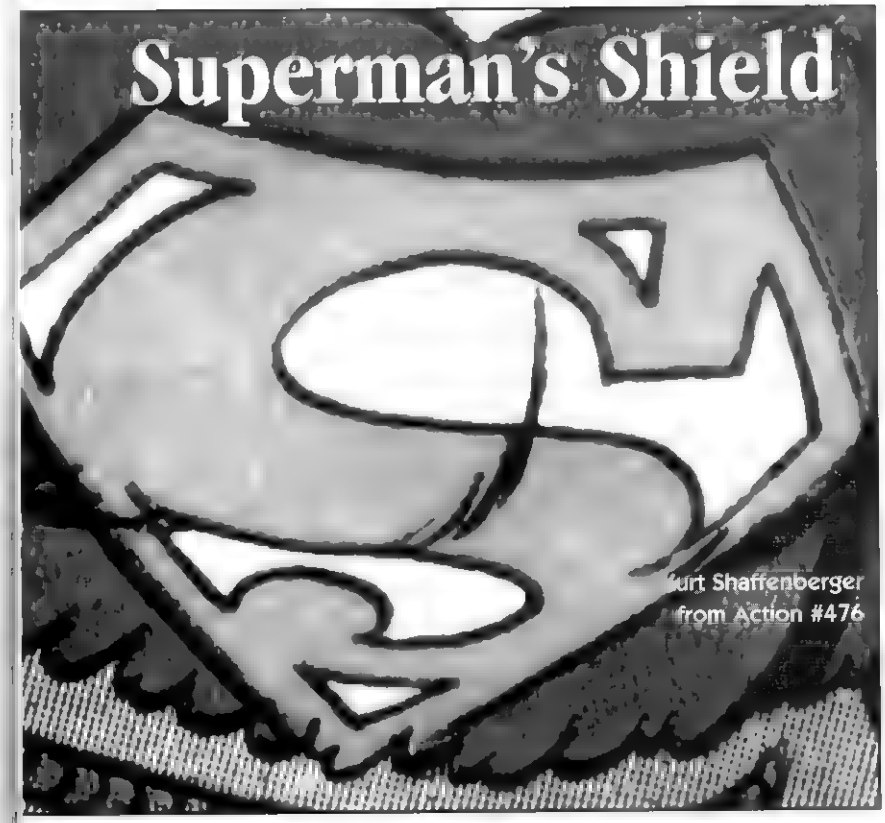
One other Golden Age artist served up a nice Superman shield–even though he didn't draw covers for *Action*, and he was best known for Batman. The great Dick Sprang handled the occasional interior Superman tale, as in *Superman* #123, and drew a number of Superman-Batman team-up stories in *World's Finest*. His Superman output was usually inked by Stan Kaye, and their collaboration on the Superman S was the closest ever to the classic Boring version.

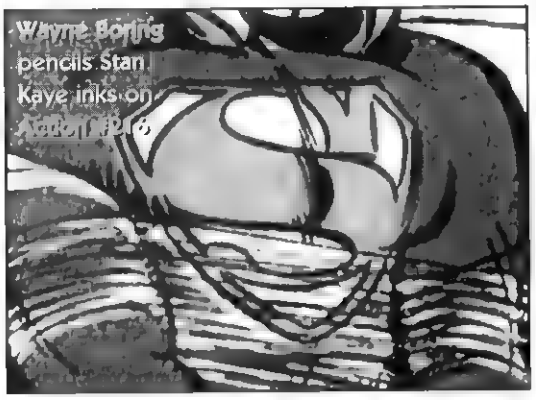
The Superman shield should have its own place in comics history. After all, the second great hero, Batman, continued the tradition of an emblem, and most other heroes followed suit. After almost six decades and dozens of interpreters, the fabled Superman shield is still the greatest emblem of them all. ■

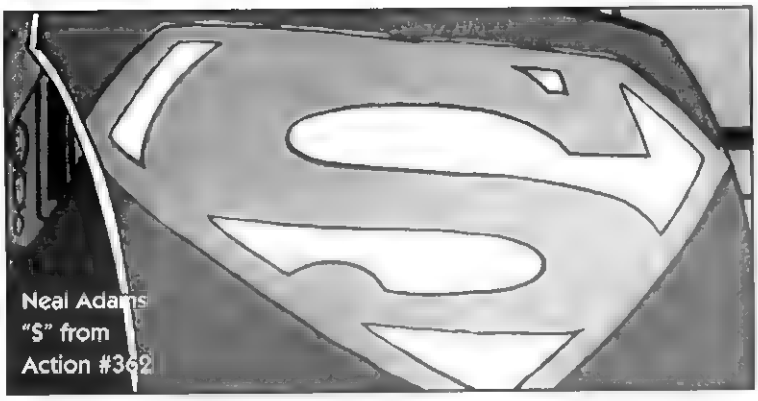
BY LYNN WOOLLEY

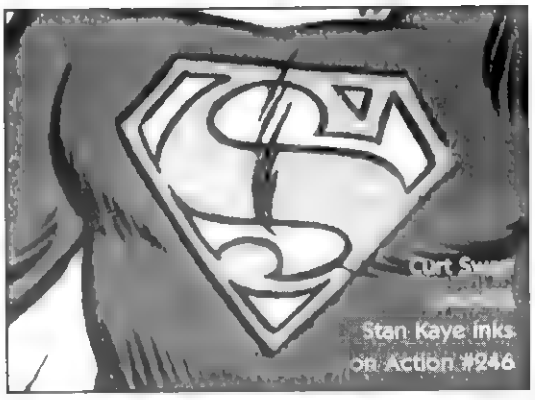
(See following page for illustrations.)

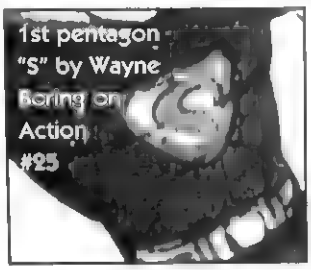
Superman's Shield

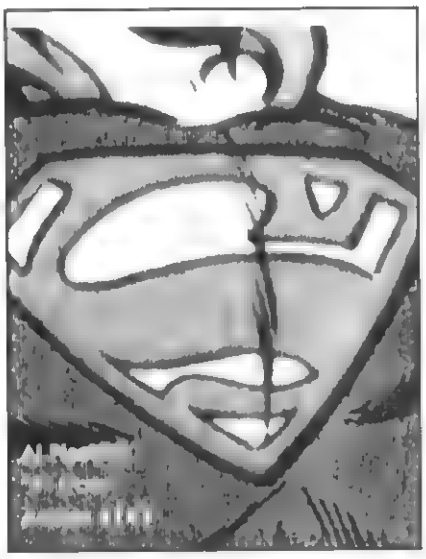


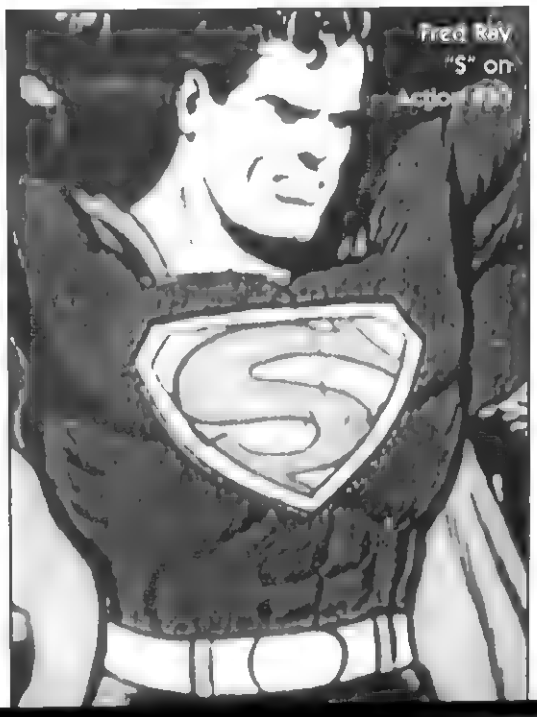












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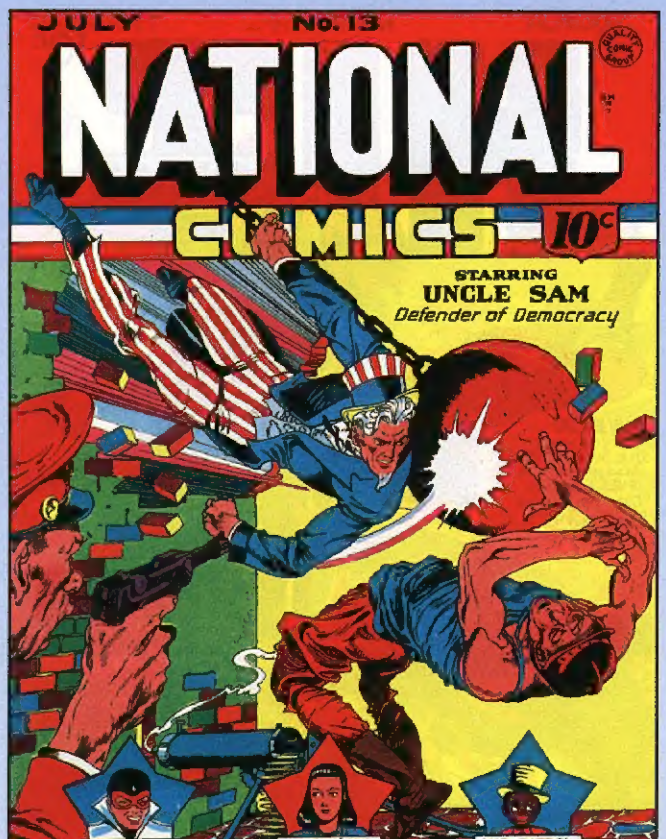

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Pre-hero Marvel started out on the right foot with classic Joe Sinnott covers on the first revival issue of *Journey Into Mystery* (#50, Jan 1959) and *Strange Tales* (#67, Feb 1959). Above right, the Silver Surfer blasts an energy bolt at the Thing in a battle of Titans rendered by one of the great Silver Age superhero art teams –Jack Kirby and Joe Sinnot– on the cover of *Fantastic Four* #55 (Oct 1966).

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Murphy Anderson's original painting recreating the cover of Fantastic Comics #3. The composition was done as a tribute to the great Lou Fine, the Golden Age artist that most influenced Anderson as a young comic reader.